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THE CHURCH.

By ENOCH POND, D. D.

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, BANGOR.

BOSTON:

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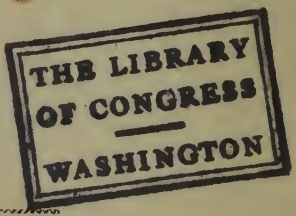

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author of the following pages is, not only by profession, but in *principle*, a Congregationalist. He believes that the popular form of church government, adopted (with some modifications) by the Congregational and Baptist churches of the United States and of England, is more nearly in accordance with apostolical usage, and better adapted to secure the great ends of church organization, than any other with which he is acquainted. Of course, he feels an interest in the explanation and vindication of this general form.

In common with many of his brethren, with whom he has had opportunity of correspondence, the writer has felt that a small treatise on the general subject of the Church, designed not exclusively for the learned, but rather for the instruction of the common mind, was much needed at the present time. This need it has been his object in some measure to supply. How far he has succeeded in this attempt, the public will decide.

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THE CHURCH.

SECTION I.

Signification of the word Church, in the New Testament.

The Greek word commonly rendered church, in the New Testament, literally signifies a *congregation*, an *assembly*. Thus the congregation of Israel in the wilderness is called a church, Acts 7: 38; and to the riotous assembly at Ephesus the same original word is applied, Acts 19: 32, 39. With reference to Christians, we find the term used in the three following senses:

1. To denote the *general invisible* church, comprising the whole body of true believers, whether on earth or in heaven. Heb. 12: 23. Col. 1: 18, 24.

2. To denote *particular visible* churches, or those bodies of *professed* believers, which were accustomed to assemble for divine worship and other religious purposes in one place; as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, the churches of Galatia, and of Macedonia. This is the more literal, and much the more common use of the word in the New Testament.

3. The word is also used, though not frequently, to denote the *general visible* church, considered as embodying all the particular visible churches. Rom. 16: 23. 1 Cor. 12: 28.

SECTION II.

Has Christ instituted any precise form of church government?

It has been made a question, whether there is any precise model of church organization and government laid down in the New Testament, to which Christians universally are under obligations to conform. By some it has been contended, that this *is* the case;—that nothing is left to the discretion of the church;—that we are bound to copy, in every partic-

ular, after the divine pattern which has been given us. By others it is asserted, that we have no divine pattern which is at all obligatory;—that Christians are left to their own judgment in this matter;—that it is not only their right, but their duty, to modify the government of the church according to the circumstances of the age and country in which they live.

The truth, I think, lies between these two extremes. The Scriptures do furnish us with at least some *general outlines* of church organization and government, from which no body of Christians is at liberty to depart. They describe, for example, the *object* of church organization, and the *character* of church members; and no Christians would be at liberty to form a society for a merely *moral* or *secular* object, and without any regard to the character of its members, and to call it a church of Christ. Nor has any body of Christians, calling themselves a church, a right to dispense with religious worship and divine ordinances, or with the ministry and officers of a church. Nor, in place of a stated pastor, would the members of a church have a right to assume the pastoral office in rotation,

one after another, for a limited time. Nor, in place of deacons, would they have a right to substitute a church committee, chosen annually, or for a shorter period. The practice of nearly all Christians shows, that they conceive *some* things in regard to church order to be settled in the New Testament; and so settled, that they are not at liberty to depart from them.

On the other hand, it would be idle to pretend, that every thing relating to church affairs, is authoritatively settled in the New Testament, so that nothing is left to the judgment of Christians. For example, the Scriptures prescribe that ministers of the gospel are to be supported; but they do not fix the precise amount of their salaries, or define the mode in which their salaries are to be raised. The Scriptures enjoin the duty of public worship; but they do not direct Christians where they shall meet, or at what hour of the day, or in what shape or form they shall build their temples. We shall search in vain for any inspired precept, requiring or forbidding church organs, or church bells, or defining particularly the length, or the precise order, of the services of the sanc-

tuary. We have a general injunction, that "all things be done *decently and in order;*" but in what particular order many things are to be done, is wisely left to the judgment of Christians.

The truth in regard to the question before us seems, therefore, to be this: there are some *general outlines* of church organization and government marked out for us by the pen of inspiration; and these, so far as they can be discovered, are to be strictly regarded. But within the range of these, God has wisely left many things to be judged of by the light of reason, and to be modified according to circumstances in providence.

SECTION III.

Scriptural authority for Congregational Churches.

It is evident from the sacred writings, that Christ intended to embody his professed followers on earth, not in one *corporate, universal* church, but in *particular, Congregational* churches.* He prepared the materials for

* I use the word Congregational here in a *general*, and not in a *technical* or *sectarian* sense.

such a church during his public ministry, which church was fully organized at Jerusalem soon after his ascension. Acts 1: 26, and 6: 5, 6.

It was a principal labor of the apostles to form such churches in the cities and villages where they preached, and where disciples were multiplied. Nearly thirty different churches are spoken of specifically in the New Testament, besides a much greater number which are referred to in more general terms.

That these churches were not of a *national* or *provincial* character appears from the fact, that when the churches of a particular country or province are mentioned, they are always spoken of in the plural number. Thus we read of, not the church, but the *churches* of Judea, of Syria, of Galatia, of Asia, and of Macedonia. See Acts 9: 31. 15: 41. 1 Cor. 16: 1, 19. 2 Cor. 8: 1. And when there were converts in a place adjoining a large city, it was not the custom of the apostles to gather them into the church of the city, but to form them into a separate church. Thus at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, there was a church, distinct from the larger church in the city. See Rom. 16: 1.

These particular churches were distinct organizations, each having its own members and officers. To be a member of one church did not constitute membership in another; nor did the holding of office in one church constitute the person holding it an officer of any other church. Thus, the teachers spoken of in the church at Antioch were not teachers or members of the church at Ephesus; nor were the elders of the church at Ephesus officers of the church at Rome. Acts 13: 1. 20: 17. Epaphroditus was a member and officer of the church at Philippi; and Phebe was servant (or deaconess) of the church at Cenchrea.* Phil. 2: 25. Rom. 16: 1.

The churches under the apostles were composed, each of them, of Christians, who were expected to come together *in one place* for public worship, and for celebrating the ordinances of the gospel. Perhaps all of them did not assemble *uniformly* in one place. The distresses of the times, and their want of suitable accommodations, might have prevented this. But that, on all occasions of common interest and concernment, the members of a

* See Appendix, Note A.

church, and even of the largest churches, were accustomed to come together, is certain. On the day of Pentecost, the church at Jerusalem were assembled "with one accord, in *one place.*" And many years after, when messengers from the church at Antioch went up to Jerusalem, with the question respecting circumcision, the apostles, and elders, and the *whole church* came together to deliberate and advise in relation to this matter. Acts. 2: 1. 15: 22. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first mission to the heathen, "they *gathered the church at Antioch together*, and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." Acts 14: 27. "Upon the first day of the week," the church at Troas "*came together* to break bread." Acts 20: 7. It is repeatedly said of the church at Corinth, that they were accustomed to "come together *into one place*," to attend upon divine worship, and to administer the discipline of the church. See 1 Cor. 5: 4. 11: 18. 14: 23.* Indeed, if the administration of disci-

* "If therefore the *whole church* be come together *into one place*," &c.

pline belongs to the church, as by the express appointment of Christ it manifestly does (see Matt. 18: 17), then the church must of necessity come together, to transact this painful but important work.

It is thus indisputably certain from our sacred writings, that Christians, under the ministry of the apostles, were collected into distinct and separate organizations, called churches, each having its own members and officers, and each consisting of such as were accustomed to assemble in one place for religious worship, and for transacting the affairs of the church.

I will only add, that if the plan of the apostles, in this respect, had been followed out in the succeeding ages; if, when Christians in the large cities and their suburbs became too numerous to assemble conveniently in one place, instead of attempting to continue together, they had amicably separated into distinct organizations; one of the stepping-stones to Romanism would have been removed, and a principal source of ambition and corruption would have been kept out of the church. In this case, the sees of Rome, and Antioch, and Alexandria, and Constantinople, would never

have been converted into princely thrones, and aspirants would not have waded into them through scenes of turmoil and blood.

SECTION IV.

The apostolic Churches voluntary associations.

The churches, in the days of the apostles, were all of them *voluntary* associations. The apostles had no compulsory power to bring men into the churches, nor did they desire any. All who joined themselves to any of the churches did it freely, and of their own accord. The three thousand, who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, acted freely. So did the Ethiopian eunuch, and Saul of Tarsus, and the Philippian jailer, and the family of Cornelius, and every other individual who, at that period, was added to a Christian church. There was no compulsion, or any thing approaching to it, in any case. The churches then were, and ever should have been, strictly *voluntary* associations.

But although every church of Christ is, and of right ought to be, a voluntary association, still, every voluntary association is not a church.

It is necessary to inquire, therefore, what there was *peculiar* in the associations of which we speak, which went to constitute them churches of Christ. And,

1. These associations consisted of persons of a *particular character*. All who joined themselves unto the churches of the apostles were required to profess faith in Christ, and to give credible evidence of piety. It was those "who were pricked in the heart," and repented, and "gladly received the word," who were admitted to the church on the day of Pentecost. It was not till the Samaritans "*believed* Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of Christ," that they were received by him to baptism and the church. The Holy Ghost fell on the family of Cornelius, and satisfied Peter as to their piety, before he would admit them to the church, and administer to them the ordinances of the gospel. Ananias objected to baptizing Saul of Tarsus, till a voice from heaven assured him of the piety of this recent persecutor. "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Acts 9: 15.

We here see what were the terms of admis-

sion to the apostolic churches, and what ought to be the terms of admission to all the visible churches of Christ. A visible church is that which is *visibly*, or which *appears* to be, a branch of the *real* church. Consequently a member of the visible church should be one who is *visibly*, or who *appears* to be, a *real* disciple and follower of the Saviour. To say that a person can be a consistent member of the *visible* church, and not *appear* to be a member of the real church, is a contradiction in terms.

Besides; none but a truly sanctified person can consistently perform those *sacramental acts*, which are required of all the members of a church. Do not those who go to the table of Christ, and feed upon the symbol of his broken body, herein plainly manifest that they are prepared to feed upon him by *faith*? Do not those who bring the consecrated cup to their lips, and partake the emblem of a Saviour's blood, herein significantly say, that their *trust* is in this precious blood? Do not those who sit at the table of Christ, in visible communion with his people, manifest, in this transaction, that they have, or that they trust they have, *holy*, *spiritual communion* with the saints? In other words, is not the whole transaction of com-

municating, a symbolical *profession of faith and holiness*, such as no one can consistently make, unless he is a holy person? To me, I must acknowledge, this matter is altogether too plain to be made the subject of dispute or doubt. It ought never to have been called in question in the church of Christ. No person can come to the Lord's table without making a virtual profession of piety; and no person should be encouraged or permitted to join himself to a church of Christ, and enter into obligations to come to his table, without furnishing satisfactory evidence, that he is prepared to come in a holy, acceptable manner.

2. Those voluntary associations, formed by the apostles, and by them denominated churches, not only consisted, as we have seen, of persons of a *particular character*, but they were formed on a *peculiar basis*, viz., that of the *holy Scriptures*. In establishing other voluntary associations, the members are guided by the particular object which they have in view; and they so form and adjust their constitution and laws as will best tend to promote this object. But in establishing churches, all who would follow in the steps of the apostles, must build entirely on the platform of the Scriptures.

Their constitution and by-laws must conform to the Scriptures. All who become connected with a church must be required to take the Scriptures as their rule. They must profess to believe whatever the Scriptures plainly teach, and promise to obey, so far as they are able, all that the Scriptures enjoin. Here then, is a very important particular in which the churches of Christ differ from all other voluntary associations.

3. The *object* for which churches are formed and sustained is altogether of a peculiar character. The object for which professed believers become associated in a church is to promote, not any merely moral or secular end, but altogether a spiritual end. Their object is, to maintain the worship and ordinances of the gospel; to promote, by all proper methods, the edification one of another; and to labor, more efficiently than would otherwise be possible, for the advancement of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls. Such is in brief, the object of all church organization. A worthy and important object truly!* An object

* It is evident from the *object* of church organization, that churches should be *particular* or *congregational;* in other words, that each should consist of those only who can statedly and conveniently come together in one place.

in reference to which the church is gloriously distinguished from all other associations existing among men.

The remarks in this section may be summed up in a definition, from which it will be seen, at a glance, in what respects churches differ from other voluntary societies. *A church is an organized body of professed believers in Christ; formed on the basis of the holy Scriptures; and having for its object the maintenance of the worship and ordinances of the gospel, the edification of its members, and their more efficient action in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ.*

SECTION V.

The question of written Creeds and Covenants.

That those who associate together in a church must have some *compact* or *covenant*, written or unwritten, expressed or implied, is obvious. Otherwise, there would be no mutual agreement or understanding between them. They would have no bond of union, and would not know at all what duties to expect, or what were expected, one of another. And if there

must be a compact or covenant, it certainly would seem desirable that this should be a written covenant; one that could not well be forgotten, and to which all the members might have liberty of appeal.

From the nature of the case it is certain, that the churches, in the days of the apostles, must have had, each of them, its covenant. In other words, there must have been a mutual understanding, an agreement, between the members, as to what course of life they were to pursue, and the duties they were to perform one towards another. We are told that they gave themselves up first unto the Lord, and to one another by the will of God. 2 Cor. 8: 5. Whether the covenants of the churches were committed to writing, at so early a period, we have no certain means of information.

In the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles, we find frequent mention made of the covenants of the churches. Tertullian, describing a church, says, "We are a body united for the conscientious performance of the duties of religion, by *an agreement in discipline*, and *a covenant of hope*." Justin Martyr represents those who were admitted into

church fellowship, as *agreeing in a resolution* to conform in all things to the word of God." Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, says, that the Christians whom he had examined, confessed nothing worse than this, that "they had entered into *a covenant* to commit no theft, robbery, or adultery, to break no promise, to violate no engagement, and to do no dishonest thing."

The same course of remark which has been pursued in relation to church covenants, may be extended also to creeds. It is certainly desirable, that those who are to unite habitually in the most solemn acts of worship, should be agreed in the essential articles of their faith; and as every Christian who believes any thing, has a creed, so every society of Christians, which holds any articles of faith in common, has a common creed. The only question is (if this can be a question), whether the creed shall be matter of *public record*, to which all concerned may have free access, and liberty of appeal, or whether it shall be left to uncertain tradition and forgetfulness.

That the churches, in the days of the apostles, had each of them its creed, or common articles of belief, relating to the birth and life, the teachings and actions, the death, resur-

rection, and ascension of Jesus—the duties which Christians owed to him, and the hopes which they entertained through him, is certain. Whether these creeds were formally *written out* by any of the apostles, cannot now be ascertained. We know that there were written creeds in the churches, at a very early period. The apostle's creed (so called) is an ancient document; though not written certainly—at least not all of it—by any of the apostles.*

A written creed should never be substituted in place of Scripture, but should be regarded as *a concise expression of what is deemed to be the sense of Scripture.* To the church adopting it, it is not itself the standard of faith, but a *transcript*, an *epitome* of that infallible standard which God has given us in his word.

No church has a right to impose its creed upon others, but merely to *propose* it for consideration, leaving those to whom is is proposed at full liberty, either to adopt it, and walk with that particular church, or to reject it, and enter into some other connexion.

With the explanation above given, I see no valid objection to written creeds and covenants, while the benefits of them are so nu-

* See Appendix, Note B.

merous and obvious, as to entitle them to an universal adoption.*

SECTION VI.

Independence and mutual Fellowship of Churches.

While the churches planted by the apostles maintained a fraternal intercourse one with another, in all holy fellowship and communion, they manifestly were independent one of another, so far as *jurisdiction* and *authority* were concerned. The apostles, indeed, as the divinely commissioned and inspired founders of churches, had a degree of authority over them, which was peculiar to themselves; but among the churches, we find no one of them, and no confederated body of them, presuming to exercise authority over the others. Not even the mother church at Jerusalem, considered in its church capacity, and as separate from the apostles, ever undertook to dictate to the other churches, or to extend its jurisdiction over them.

The independence of the primitive church-

* Appendix, Note C.

es, in the sense and to the extent here explained, is not only sanctioned by the Scriptures, but most explicitly asserted by learned and impartial historians, who have investigated the subject. Waddington, an Episcopalian of the church of England, speaking of the church in the first century, says, "Every church was essentially *independent of every other.* The churches, thus constituted and regulated, formed a sort of federative body of *independent religious communities*, dispersed through the greater part of the Roman empire, in continual communication, and in constant harmony with each other." *

Mosheim, a Lutheran, who could have had no predilection for the doctrine of Independency, thus describes the state of things in the first century: "All the churches, in those primitive times, were *independent bodies;* or none of them subject to the jurisdiction of any other. For though the churches which were founded by the apostles themselves frequently had the honor shown them to be consulted in difficult cases, yet they had *no judicial authority, no control, no power of giving laws.* On

* Ecc. Hist., p. 43.

the contrary, *it is clear as the noonday, that all Christian churches had equal rights, and were in all respects on a footing of equality.*" The same author, speaking of the second century, says, "During a great part of this century, all the churches continued to be, as at first, *independent of each other*, or were connected by no consociations or confederations. Each church was a kind of little *independent republic*, governed by its own laws, which were enacted, or at least sanctioned, by the people."*

The testimony of Neander on the subject before us, is entirely accordant with that of Mosheim. He enlarges upon the free and popular form of government adopted by the churches in the first century, and describes them as sustaining, in relation to each other, "a sisterly system of *equality.*"

But while the primitive churches were, in the sense explained, independent of each other, they were bound together by the strongest ties, and maintained (as hinted above) a constant intercourse, in all suitable acts of fellowship and communion. They were to

* Ecc. Hist. (Murdock's edition), vol. i, pp. 86, 142.

each other objects of deep interest, and of mutual concern and prayer. As their teachers journeyed from place to place, it is not to be doubted that they had an interchange of pastoral labors. The members, too, when absent from their own churches, were freely admitted to communion in the assemblies of their brethren. The primitive churches sent Christian salutations and letters of instruction and warning one to another. They also sent messengers one to another, and administered relief to one another in distress. They cheerfully bore one another's burdens, and in cases of doubt and difficulty, looked to each other for advice.

This fellowship of churches, established by the apostles, was continued under the ministry of their immediate successors. Before the close of the first century, Clement of Rome addressed an epistle to the Corinthian church, which commences as follows: "The church of God which is at Rome, to the church of God which is at Corinth, elect, sanctified by the will of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Various instances occur, in the age immediately succeeding that of the apostles, in which one church, or the pastor of some

one church, addresses letters of exhortation to other churches.*

This intimate and holy fellowship of churches is no more inconsistent with their independence, than the friendly intercourse of neighbors is inconsistent with their being, each and all of them, independent citizens. I have no right, as an individual, to exercise authority over my neighbor, nor he over me. Still, it is proper that we should maintain a mutual friendly intercourse, and perform towards each other all the offices of neighborhood and kindness.

The independence of churches, in the sense here explained, I hold to be one of those peculiar, apostolical features of church government, which ought never to have been invaded or relinquished. It began to be invaded, about the middle of the second century, by the establishment of synods with *dictatorial powers*;† and it continued to be invaded more

* Appendix, Note D.

† "These synods or councils," says Mosheim, "of which we find not the *smallest trace* before the middle of the second century, changed the whole face of the church, and gave it a new form; for by them the ancient privileges of the people were diminished, and the power and author-

and more, till at length it utterly disappeared from the church. And when this was gone, there was no let or hindrance to the progress of usurpation, until all the churches became merged in one universal church; and all power was concentrated in the lordly bishop of Rome.

The independence of particular churches, modified by established forms of ecclesiastical intercourse and fellowship, constitutes the peculiar characteristic, and (as I think) the *glory* of Congregationalism.* In the government of many denominations of Christians, this independence is taken away. The particular churches are all merged in a general church, and are subject to a jurisdiction above

ity of the bishops greatly augmented." There could have been no danger in these synods, and might have been much benefit, if they had confined themselves to *deliberation and counsel;* but they soon "turned their influence into *dominion*, and their counsels into *laws*, and openly asserted that Christ had empowered them to prescribe to his people *authoritative rules of faith and manners.*"—*Ecc. Hist.*, Cent. ii, Part ii, Chap. 2.

* I use the term Congregationalism here, as in other places, in its widest sense, including under it all those sects of Christians who retain the principle of independency, and whose government is of the popular kind.

and without themselves. But not so in the Congregational churches. All power here originates (under Christ) in the church, and terminates in the church. The stream never rises higher than the fountain. There may be church conferences or consociations, and ministerial associations for mutual encouragement, edification and prayer; but these can exercise no jurisdiction, control, or authority over the churches. Councils may be called, and may give advice; but this advice may be accepted or rejected. To be sure, where the advice of a council is unreasonably rejected, there may follow a breach of fellowship between the churches giving it, and the church rejecting it. Still, each and every church retains its independence, so far as jurisdiction is concerned, being amenable only to its divine Shepherd and Head.

To some, this system of government has appeared loose and defective; but I have no doubt that it is, for substance, the same, which was bequeathed to the churches by the divine Saviour and his apostles. And neither can I doubt, that experience has shown it to be better adapted to the great ends and purposes of church organization, than any of the numer-

ous forms which have been substituted in its place. Where shall we look for churches more efficient and flourishing, than those of the first century and a half of the Christian era? And where, since that period, shall we look for churches more efficient and flourishing, than those of the Congregationalists and Baptists of England and America? To be sure, there have been occasional breaches of fellowship; but these have resulted rather from misapprehension, or a want of brotherly love, than from any inherent defect of ecclesiastical organization. Of course, the proper remedy for them is to be sought in a better understanding of our peculiar principles, and in an increase of the spirit of love, and not in a departure from that form of church government which we believe to have been sanctioned by Christ and his apostles.

SECTION VII.

Powers and Rights of a Church.

1. Every church has a right to *elect its own officers*. This is a natural, inherent right of all voluntary associations. Who would call

in question the right of any other voluntary society to organize itself, by the election of such officers as its constitution required? And who can, with any reason, deny this right to churches, unless indeed it be expressly denied to them by the Saviour?

But this right, so far from being denied to the churches by Christ and his apostles, is, as we think, expressly *granted* to them. The churches were accustomed to elect their officers in the presence and under the eye of the apostles themselves. When an individual was to be appointed to fill the place of Judas, the disciples *chose two* from among their number, one of whom was designated by lot to be numbered with the apostles. Acts 1: 23. When deacons were to be appointed in the church at Jerusalem, these were first *chosen by the church*, and afterwards ordained by the apostles. Acts 6: 5. The churches of Macedonia *chose* delegates to travel with Paul and his company, and carry their contributions to the poor. 2 Cor. 8: 19.*

* Clement, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, the earliest and best authenticated fragment of Christian antiquity, affirms, that the apostles set apart approved persons unto the office of the ministry, "with *the consent of the whole church.*"

This right of choosing its own officers continued to be exercised in the church long after the age of the apostles. During the first century, says Waddington, "on the death of a president, or bishop, or pastor, *the choice of a successor devolved on the members of the society.* In this election, the people had an equal share; and it is clear that their right in this matter was not barely testimonial, but *judicial* and *elective.* This appointment was final, requiring no confirmation from any civil power, or any superior prelate."* Mosheim, in his history of the second century, says, "The form of church government, which began to exist in the preceding century, was in this more industriously established and confirmed in all its parts. One president or bishop presided over each church, *who was created by the common suffrage of the whole people.*" Vol. i, p. 142.

Origen, near the close of his last book against Celsus, represents elders as "*chosen* to their office," by the churches which they rule. Cyprian insists largely on the right of

* Ecc. Hist., p. 43. Neander testifies to the same fact. So also does Bingham, in his Antiquities of the Christian Church, Book iv, chap. 2.

churches to choose their own officers, affirming that this was the practice, not only of the African churches, but of those in most of the other provinces of the Roman empire. *Epis.* 68. Socrates, speaking of the election of Chrysostom, says, "he was chosen by the common vote of all, both clergy and people."* Theodoret describes the election of Eustatius in the same manner, when he says, "he was compelled to take the bishopric, by the common vote of the bishops and clergy and all the people." †

2. Another obvious right of the churches is that of *admitting* and *excluding* members. The right of *admitting* members belongs to churches, in common with all other voluntary associations. Also the right of *censuring* and *excluding* unworthy members is clearly a *natural* right of the churches, and as such is expressly recognised in the New Testament. When a member of this character is not reclaimed by private remonstrance, our Saviour directs that his case be brought *before the church:* and if he hear not the church, he is by them to be excommunicated. Matt. 18: 17. "When,"

* Ecc. Hist., Lib. vi, Cap. 2. † Ibid., Lib. i, Cap. 7.

says Neander, "a vicious person is to be excluded from the church at Corinth, the apostle regards it as something which must proceed from the whole church." 1 Cor. 5: 4. And when this same person, being humbled, is to be forgiven and restored, his restoration is to be effected by the same body. 2 Cor. 2: 7.

3. Still another right of the churches is that of *holding and controlling their own property.* The apostle, speaking of widows, says, "If any who believe have widows, let them relieve them, and let not *the church be charged;*" a form of expression which implies that the church at that period had funds, which it disposed of at discretion. 1 Tim. 6: 16. The church at Jerusalem was early in possession of property to a very considerable amount. For a time, at least, it seems to have held the property of all its members. For "as many of them as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet." Acts 4: 34. It was to take charge of the property of the church, and see to its equitable distribution, that the order of deacons was first instituted. Acts 6: 3.*

* By the laws of Massachusetts and Maine, and perhaps

In short, every church may be said to have a right to dispose of its own proper internal concerns, subject only to such restrictions and regulations as have been imposed by Christ himself. It has a right to do all that is necessary to be done, in order to preserve its own existence, and to secure to itself the privileges and blessings of the gospel.

SECTION VIII.

Officers of a Church.

It is matter of general acknowledgment, that there are *two* distinct orders of officers in the church of Christ, viz. those of pastors and deacons.* Episcopalians divide the order of

of some other of the States, "the deacons of the several Protestant churches (not Episcopal) are *incorporated*, to take in succession all grants and donations, whether real or personal, made either to their several churches, the poor of their churches, or to them and their successors, and to sue and defend in all actions touching the same."

* There are differences in *degree* among church officers, which do not amount to a difference of *order*. Thus, in the general order of presbyters, among ourselves, there are pastors, missionaries, theological professors, and evange-

pastors into those of bishops and presbyters, thus making *three* distinct orders, instead of two. They insist that Christ has instituted *three orders* of ministers in his church, of which bishops are the first; and that it belongs to bishops, each in his own diocese, to consecrate churches, to confirm and exclude members, to ordain ministers, and in general to administer the government of the church. This theory, in order to be admitted, must be established by proof; the burden of which lies, obviously, on the hands of its abettors. If they can support it by sound and sufficient arguments, then let it be universally received. If not, it may well be regarded in the light of mere theory. It is proposed now to examine the principal arguments by which the above theory has been attempted to be supported. And,

1. Some of its advocates derive an analogy in its favor from the doctrine of the *trinity*.

lists. So in the times of the apostles, there were differences in *degree* among the teaching officers of the church, and these were designated by different names, as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers; while all may have been classed under the same general *order*. 1 Cor. 12: 28. Eph. 4 : 11.

This has recently been done by Bishop Hopkins of Vermont.* This analogy however, if there be any, is too remote to be apprehended by common minds. Because there are three persons in the Godhead, it is not quite certain that there are, or should be, three orders of ministers in the church of Christ. And besides, if this argument were admitted, it would militate directly against the views of those who advance it. The three persons in the Godhead are equal. Do Episcopalians allow that the supposed three orders of ministers are equal?

2. Another argument for the three orders of ministers is drawn from the analogy of the *Jewish priesthood.* As among the Jews, there were the high-priest, the priests, and Levites, so among Christians, there should be bishops, presbyters, and deacons. But the priesthood in Israel was not designed to prefigure the gospel ministry, but rather the priesthood of the Son of God. The high-priest in Israel was a type of the great "High-Priest of our profession;" and the sacrifices which were offered by the Jewish priesthood all looked forward to the

* Primitive Church, &c., p. 235.

great atoning sacrifice which was offered on the cross. There is properly no priest under the gospel dispensation, except the Lord Jesus Christ. "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, hath he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." To call a gospel minister a *priest* is a palpable perversion and abuse of the term.*

The Romanists, who hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation, and believe that in every mass, or celebration of the eucharist, there is offered a literal sacrifice, may consistently denominate their ministers priests. But in the mouth of a Protestant, the term, as applied to gospel ministers, is strange and unmeaning. Hence, no analogy can be drawn from the priesthood in Israel, by which to determine the different orders of ministers in the kingdom of Christ.†

* Gospel ministers are never called priests in the New Testament, except as they are included in the general company of believers, who are mystically denominated "*kings* and *priests* unto God." Rev. 1 : 6.

† The ministry of the church of Christ was derived, not from the temple, but the synagogue. According to Dean Prideaux, "the first officers in the synagogue were *the*

And if this analogy were admissible, it would prove too much for those *Protestants* who rely upon it. It would prove the necessity, not of a bench of bishops, but of a *prince* of bishops, a *Pope*, who should be as highly exalted above his brethren, as the high-priest in Israel was above the chief priests, or perhaps the ordinary priests.

3. It has been said that bishops, as distinct from presbyters, are *expressly spoken of in the New Testament.* That bishops are repeatedly and expressly spoken of in the New Testament is certain; but it is also certain, from a comparison of passages, that the terms bishop and presbyter are there used interchangeably, as referring not only to the same office, but often to the same persons. Paul, writing to

elders, who governed all the affairs of it, and directed all the duties of religion therein to be performed. These are in the New Testament called *the rulers of the synagogue.*" Under these "were the *deacons*, or inferior ministers of the synagogue, who kept the sacred books, and all other utensils belonging to the synagogue, and brought them forth, whenever they were to be used in the public service. Thus it is said of our Saviour, when he was called upon to read in the synagogue of Nazareth, that after he had done, he gave *the book again to the minister.*" Luke 4: 20.—*Prideaux' Connexion*, Part i, Book 6, Sect. 4.

the Philippians, mentions no church officers but bishops and deacons. And when giving directions to Timothy respecting the qualifications of church officers, he mentions none but bishops and deacons;—a manifest indication that these were the only standing officers in the apostolical churches, and of course that bishop and presbyter relate to the same office. See Phil. 1: 1. 1 Tim. 3: 1. And this conclusion is established, by a reference to other passages. Titus was left in Crete, that he might ordain elders or presbyters in every city. But in a following verse, these elders are denominated bishops. Tit. 1: 5–7. In his valedictory address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul calls these elders *overseers* or (as in the original) *bishops*. Acts 20: 17, 28. Peter exhorts elders to take the oversight of the flock, or (as it is in the Greek) to do the work of *bishops*, not by constraint, but willingly. 1 Pet. 5: 2. These passages show that, in the language of the apostles, elder and bishop denote the same office, and are applied often to the same person.

4. It has been urged in favor of the three orders of ministers in the church of Christ,

that *during his personal ministry*, there were three orders, viz., himself, the twelve apostles, and the seventy. But to this argument there are many objections; as,

(1.) It represents Christ as a minister in his own church,—a servant of himself!

(2.) It involves the absurdity and arrogance of supposing that, on the death of Christ, the apostles were promoted to the same rank in the church, which he held during his life; and that, on the death of the apostles, bishops were placed in the same exalted rank. They became all of them literally, what one of them has arrogantly claimed to be, Christ's *vicars*, his *vicegerents* upon the earth.

(3.) This argument implies farther, that the seventy were an order of ministers distinct from the apostles, and inferior to them;—a supposition of which the gospels furnish not a particle of proof. To be sure, the twelve were commissioned at one time, and the seventy at another; but they were commissioned to the same work, and in almost precisely the same words. (Compare Luke 9: 1–6, with Luke 10: 1–20.) During the lifetime of Jesus, the work of the apostles was altogether preparatory, and so was that of the seventy;

and both were commissioned to do the same things.

(4.) The supposition before us leaves no place for the important preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. He surely must be admitted into the number of ministers, and then we have four orders instead of three.

(5.) It is objection enough to this argument, if there were no other, that during the life of Jesus, the Christian church had no organized existence. The old dispensation, with all its rules and ceremonies, continued in full force till the death of the Saviour. The vail of the temple was not rent in twain, till the hour of his death. The hand-writing of ordinances was not taken away, till it was nailed to his cross. But if the Christian church had no organized existence, before the death of Christ, then surely it could not have had an organized ministry.

5. It has been urged again in favor of the three orders of ministers, that when the triad above considered had been broken up by the ascension of our Lord, it was almost immediately restored, by the appointment of the seven deacons. There were then the apostles, the seventy, and the deacons. It may be ob-

jected to this argument, as to the preceding, that it supposes the apostles, on the ascension of Christ, to have come into the same rank which he had previously occupied;—a supposition involving an arrogance of assumption, from which they would have shrunk back with horror.

It may also be objected to this argument, that it mistakes altogether the nature and character of that ministry, by which the gospel dispensation was introduced. It supposes this ministry to have been settled and permanent, whereas it was obviously *preparatory* and *temporary*. Such was the ministry of John the Baptist. It accomplished its end, and passed away. Such would have been the ministry of the apostles, if they had not received a new and more extended commission, after the resurrection of the Saviour. And such was the ministry of the seventy. They were sent out for a specific purpose—to prepare the way of the Lord—to "go before him, into every city and place whither he himself would come." Luke 10: 1. The object of their ministry they soon accomplished, and then their service ended. Accordingly, we hear of them no more. There is not the slight-

est mention of them in any subsequent part of the gospel history. From the mere silence of Scripture respecting them, the conclusion is incontestible, that they had no existence, after the resurrection of Christ, as a commissioned and authorized body of ministers.

I object further to the argument under consideration, that it supposes a necessity, and assigns a reason, for the appointment of deacons, of which the apostles seem never to have thought. In directing this appointment, instead of the plain account recorded in the sixth chapter of Acts, why did not the apostles say, 'As we have now come into the place of the ascended Saviour, and the seventy have come into our place, therefore, let an order of deacons be created to come into their place.' A reason such as this for the appointment of deacons, in all probability never occurred to the apostles. Certain it is, they never urged it, and never could have urged it consistently with truth.

It may be still farther objected to the argument before us, not only that the apostles were not promoted into the place of the Saviour, and the seventy into the place of the apostles, but *neither did the deacons come into the place of*

the seventy. Not to urge, what is commonly believed, that these deacons themselves belonged to the number of the seventy, scarcely any two offices can be conceived of as more distinct, than those of the seventy, and of the deacons. The work of the seventy, as I have said, was altogether preparatory. They were to go before the face of Christ into every city and place whither he himself would come. On the contrary, the business of the deacons was to take charge of the property of the church, and make equitable distribution of it, in relieving the necessities of the poor.

6. It is urged again, in proof of the three orders of ministers, that *these orders actually existed in the apostolic churches*. There were then the apostles, the presbyters, and deacons. And in proof that these three orders were designed to be perpetuated, it is urged that the apostles ordained successors to themselves. Such was Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus at Crete. Such were all the bishops of the primitive churches. And such, by an uninterrupted succession, are the bishops of our own times.

In examining this argument, it will be necessary to ascertain, so far as we can, the pre-

cise nature and character of the apostolical office. And in doing this, we may consider the apostles in a twofold light; first, as simple ministers of Christ; and secondly, as ministers destined to a peculiar work, and clothed with peculiar authority and power.

In the first place, the apostles may be considered as *simple ministers of Jesus Christ.* They were commissioned as ministers, and the commission which Christ gave to them is the only one which he has ever given to his ministering servants. It is that under which all his ministers now act, and to which they continually appeal: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," &c. Mark 16: 15.

And as the apostles were commissioned, like other ministers, so they often speak of themselves as mere ministers of Christ. "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ." "Who hath made us able ministers of Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 4: 1. 2 Cor. 3: 6. The apostles often speak of themselves as in the rank of *elders.* "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder." 1 Pet. 5: 1. "The elder unto the elect lady." "The elder unto the well beloved Gaius." 2

and 3 John. As simple ministers of Jesus Christ, the apostles *have left* successors after them. In this view, all Christ's faithful ministers may be regarded as in the succession of the apostles.

But the apostles were destined to a peculiar work, and were clothed with peculiar authority and powers; and in all that was peculiar to them, and which went to raise them above other ministers, it will appear that they have left no successors.

(1.) The apostles were commissioned *directly by Christ*, as no other ministers of the gospel ever were.

(2.) It was a part of the peculiar work of the apostles to *bear witness* to the actions and sufferings of Jesus. This is evident from what was said at the appointment of Matthias to the apostleship. "One must be ordained to be a *witness* with us of his resurrection." Acts 1:22. In this important part of their work, the apostles can have left no successors.

(3.) As the *first missionaries of Christ* and *founders of churches*, the apostles have left no successors. None can pretend to have succeeded to that degree of authority and influence in the churches, which they rightfully possessed.

(4.) The apostles were *inspired* men; and as such, were qualified to publish doctrines to the churches, and to enact laws, which should carry with them the authority of God. Here, again, they have left no successors.

(5.) The apostles were endowed, beyond others, with the power of performing miracles; for they not only wrought miracles themselves, but could *impart* this gift, by the laying on of their hands. See Acts 8: 15–20. Who has succeeded to them in this respect?

(6.) The apostles not only had authority in the churches as inspired men, but they were able to enforce this authority, by *inflicting judgments* on the disobedient. Thus Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, at the word of Peter; and Elymas the sorcerer was smitten with blindness, at the word of Paul. Acts 5: 1–10. 13: 11. To this terrific power of the apostles, Paul repeatedly alludes in his addresses to the Corinthians. "If I come again, I will not spare." "Shall I come unto you with a rod," &c. 2 Cor. 13: 2. 1 Cor. 4: 21. The apostles are here presented in another light, in which they manifestly have no successors.

It follows from what has been said, that,

while in the mere office of gospel ministers, the apostles have been succeeded by all faithful ministers, from their own times to the present, in those things which went to distinguish them from ordinary ministers, to raise them above them, and to confer a peculiarity and a superiority, the apostles have left no successors. From the nature of the case, they can have left none. And if any will pretend to be the successors of the apostles, in their high and peculiar character—in that which went to distinguish them from ordinary ministers; then let them prove their succession by something more than mere words. Let them show to the world that they *are* what the apostles once were. Have they received their commission *directly* from the Saviour? Were they *eye-witnesses* of his life, death, and resurrection? Have they claim to authority and influence as the first missionaries of Christ, and (under God) the founders of his church? Have they inspiration—and the gift of miracles—and the power to impart this gift? Are they armed, as the apostles were, with the judgments of heaven, and authorized to inflict these judgments on the rebellious? In other words, *are* they what the apostles were?

Have they succeeded to all or to aught of that which went to give to the apostles their peculiarity and authority in the church of Christ? If not, then let them boast no more of their being the successors of the apostles. They can be successors of the apostles in no other sense than as all faithful gospel ministers are; —in no other sense than as being *the simple ministers of Jesus.*

If bishops, as a distinct and superior order of ministers, have succeeded to the apostles, then why are they not *called* apostles? Why has the name of office been changed? These two names are not synonymous; nor were they ever so considered in the church of Christ. An apostle is not a bishop, nor is a bishop an apostle. An apostle is a missionary; a minister at large; one who has (what Paul tells us he had) "the care of all the churches." 2 Cor. 11: 28. A bishop has, or should have, a pastoral charge. He is the overseer of a particular flock. He is confined in his attentions to a particular field of labor. But to what particular fields of labor were the apostles confined? To what part of the Christian world did not their influence and authority extend? It is evidence enough

that bishops, in their alleged superior capacity, have not succeeded to the apostles, that they have not succeeded to the *name* of the apostles, nor to that which this name specifically imports. In short, they are *not* apostles, either as to the name, or the thing.*

It is alleged that the apostles, in their superior capacity, ordained successors to themselves. Such, in particular, was Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus at Crete. But what evidence have we that Timothy was ever bishop of Ephesus? He is never so called in the Scriptures; nor does it appear that he ever had a permanent residence at Ephesus. "I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doc-

* "The function of an apostle differed widely from that of a bishop; and I therefore do not think that James, who was an apostle, was ever appointed to, or discharged, the episcopal office at Jerusalem. The government of the church in that city, it rather seems to me, was placed in the hands of its presbyters, but so as that nothing of moment could be done, without the advice and authority of James, the same sort of respectful deference being paid to his will, as had formerly been manifested for that of the apostles at large."—*Mosheim's Commentaries*, Vol. i, p. 231.

trine." 1 Tim. 1: 3. Here is all the proof which the Scriptures furnish, that Timothy was constituted bishop of Ephesus. And this is not only no proof at all, but strong proof of the contrary supposition; as it is evident, from the passage itself, that Timothy's mission at Ephesus was a temporary one, which he was expected to discharge, and then leave the place. Paul and Timothy were at Ephesus together, at the time of the uproar occasioned by Demetrius.* On account of this disturbance, Paul left suddenly, and "departed for to go into Macedonia;" (Acts 20: 1) and he besought Timothy to remain for a time, that he might farther instruct and regulate the newly planted Ephesian church. Timothy, without doubt, did remain for a time, and then commenced following the apostle as usual; for subsequent to this date, we repeatedly hear of Timothy in connection with the apostle, but never as a permanent resident at

* Timothy and Erastus had previously been sent into Macedonia, but while Paul "stayed in Asia for a season," Timothy returned to him; so that he was with him at Ephesus at the time of the disturbance. See Acts 19 : 23. Also Acts 20 : 1, and 1 Tim. 1 : 3. I follow the chronology of Lardner here.

Ephesus. 2 Cor. 1: 1. Phil. 1: 1. Heb. 13: 23.

That Paul constituted Timothy an apostle or bishop at Ephesus, before leaving the place to go into Macedonia, and before writing to him this first epistle, is contradicted by all the circumstances of his leaving, and by the very language of the epistle itself. As remarked above, he left Ephesus suddenly, and without opportunity for so solemn an act as that of constituting a new apostle. And then the language of the epistle, though kind and respectful, is not that of one apostle to another, but rather that of *Paul the apostle* to a beloved young minister, whose appropriate labor and privilege it was to attend upon him, and to execute his orders.

But there is another consideration, which proves conclusively that Timothy could not have been ordained bishop of Ephesus, at the time referred to in this first epistle. At a subsequent period, when Paul called for the Ephesian elders, and met them at Miletus, there was no bishop over them. In his address to them on this occasion, no mention is made of Timothy as their bishop, or of his ever having been their bishop. Indeed, no

mention is made of any bishop, except as they were all bishops alike. It is morally certain that Timothy was not bishop of Ephesus at the time of this meeting, and that he never had been. And it is quite certain that Paul did not constitute him bishop of Ephesus subsequent to this meeting, as the apostle never was at Ephesus more. He never saw the faces of these elders afterwards. Acts 20: 25.* I hold therefore, not only that there is no evidence in Scripture that Timothy was ever bishop of Ephesus, but that there is abundant evidence to the contrary. Indeed, Timothy was not a bishop in any sense, except as all Christ's ministers may be denominated bishops. Timothy was an *evangelist.* He is expressly called an evangelist; and called so, long after his alleged exaltation to a bishopric—to an *apostleship.* 2 Tim. 4: 5. An evangelist, in the primitive church, was an itinerant preacher, a missionary, who had no settled pastoral charge, who labored frequently in company with some one of the apostles, and was under their direction. Such was Philip; and such was Timothy;—and this

* Appendix, Note E.

account of the matter agrees with all that we find written or said of Timothy in the New Testament.

Of Titus, it is said, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Chap. 1: 5. But this passage, so far from proving that Titus was, at this time, bishop of Crete, furnishes evidence to the contrary. It appears on the face of it, that Titus was left in Crete for a temporary and specific purpose, which purpose being accomplished, he would naturally be called away to some other field of labor. Accordingly, we hear of Titus afterwards, not as residing in Crete, and exercising the office of a bishop there, but as gone to another place. 2 Tim. 4: 10.

Titus, like Timothy, was, no doubt, an evangelist; and was left in Crete to "do the work of an evangelist." And if it be objected, that *ordaining elders* is the work, not of evangelists, but of bishops only, I have only to say, *let this be proved.* The presbyters at Antioch laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, before they were sent out on their first mission to the heathen. Acts 13: 3. Timothy was or-

dained "by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." 1 Tim. 4: 14. Until it is proved, in face of these examples, that bishops only have the power of ordination, it never can be proved that Titus was a bishop, simply because he took it upon him to ordain.

If Titus was bishop of Crete, he was not a parochial, but a *diocesan* bishop;—bishop, not of a single church, but of a great many churches, scattered over this extensive island. In other words, if he was bishop at all, he was such a bishop as was not known, and cannot be found in the church of Christ, during the next two hundred years. To my own mind, this is *conclusive* evidence, that Titus never was bishop of Crete. And thus the alleged apostolic succession of bishops fails, in the first stages of it, and the argument derived from it falls to the ground.*

7. It has been urged in proof of a third order of ministers in the church, that, in his messages to the seven churches of Asia, our Saviour addresses an individual in each, whom he calls *its angel.* But how do we know that this angel was a bishop? The words angel

* See Appendix, Note F.

and bishop are not synonymous, nor have we any authority in the primitive age for using them interchangeably.

Some have supposed that, by the angel of the church, our Saviour intended the church itself, or the ministry of the church, without applying the term to any particular individual. In proof of this it has been urged, that the address, in every instance, is properly to the church, and that the plural number is sometimes used in place of the singular. "The devil shall cast *some of you* into prison, that *ye* may be tried, and *ye* shall have tribulation ten days;"—a singular form of expression to to be used, in reference to an individual.

Others have supposed that the angel of the church was the *presiding presbyter* in the church. In each of these churches there were, probably, several presbyters who, when they met for business or devotion, would need a moderator, or presiding officer. Such an officer was common in the next century, and was called the president of the church. Possibly, the usage may have been introduced as early as the close of the first century; and the presiding presbyter or elder may be denominated by our Saviour the angel of the church.

This supposition is the more probable, since, according to Prideaux, one of the presbyters of the Jewish synagogue—the one who officiated in offering the public prayers—was customarily called *the angel of the congregation.**

8. It is further urged, in proof of the three orders of ministers in the church of Christ, that these orders prevailed in the ages immediately succeeding the apostles, and (with few exceptions) have prevailed in all periods since. In reply to this argument, it is proposed, not to quote the fathers at length—our limits do not admit of this;—but to give, in as few words as possible, the *results* of a full and laborious examination of *the fathers of the first two centuries*, with reference to this very subject.

Hermas, the author of the Shepherd, was a member of the church at Rome, and lived in the first century. He uses the terms bishop and presbyter promiscuously, and speaks of presbyters as *presiding over* the church at Rome. Vis. ii, Sect. 4.

One of the earliest and best accredited pieces of Christian antiquity is the first epistle of the

* Connexion, Part i, Book 6, Sect. 4.

Roman Clement to the Corinthians. This epistle is addressed, not from one bishop to another, but from the *church* at Rome to the *church* at Corinth. In it the writer says, that the apostles every where appointed *bishops* and *deacons* in the churches—making no mention of a third order. He says that presbyters had been *placed over* the church at Corinth, and complains that certain presbyters had been ejected from the *episcopate*. He exhorts the Corinthian brethren to restore these ejected presbyters, and to *submit themselves* to them. The phraseology of this celebrated epistle is precisely similar to that of Paul, on the same subject. No mention is made of more than two orders of church officers, and the terms bishop and presbyter are used continually as referring to the same office. Sect. 42–57.

Of Polycarp we have only one epistle remaining, which is addressed, not to the bishop, but to the *church*, at Philippi. In it the word bishop does not once occur. Polycarp exhorts the Philippians to be subject to their *presbyters* and *deacons*. Sect. 5.

In what remains of Papias, there is no mention made of bishops, but of presbyters only. This father denominates the apostles *presby-*

ters. "If I met any where with one who had conversed with the presbyters, I inquired after the sayings of the presbyters; what Andrew, what Peter, what Philip, what Thomas or James had said." In Euseb. Ecc. Hist., Book iii, Chap. 39.

In the writings of Justin, there is no mention made of bishops. He speaks of one in each church as its *president;* and the president and deacon are the only church officers of which he gives us any account. Apol. i, pp. 95, 97.

Irenæus uses the terms bishop and presbyter interchangeably.* He speaks of "traditions preserved in the churches through a succession of presbyters." Polycarp, who

* "We ought to obey those *presbyters* who have succession from the apostles, who, with the succession of the *episcopate*, received the certain gift of truth." "Such *presbyters* the church nourishes, concerning whom the prophet says, I will give you *princes* in peace, and *bishops* in righteousness." *Advers. Hæres*, Lib. 4., Cap. 43, 44.

Writing to Victor, bishop of Rome, Irenæus repeatedly denominates the early *bishops* of Rome, those who had preceded Victor, *presbyters.* See Euseb. Ecc. Hist., Book 5., Chap. 24.

was bishop of the church at Smyrna, he represents as "an apostolical presbyter."*

Clemens Alexandrinus (a presbyter) speaks of himself, and others like him, as having *rule over the churches*, and as being called pastors. He sometimes speaks of bishop and presbyter as the same, and sometimes makes a distinction between them.†

Various epistles have been published under the name of Ignatius, an early minister or bishop of the church at Antioch. From among these, seven have been selected, abridged, and published by archbishop Wake, as being probably genuine. There is too much evidence, however, that these seven are spurious, or at least that they have been interpolated, and with special reference to this very subject.‡ In these epistles, the three orders of ministers are pretty frequently and distinctly recognised. There is this, however, to be considered: The bishop of Ignatius is never a *diocesan* bishop, but the mere pastor of a single church.‖

* Epis. to Florinus, in Euseb. Ecc. Hist., Book 5, Ch. 20.

† Pædog. Lib. i, vi. See also Tract "Quis Dives," &c.

‡ See Appendix, Note G.

‖ Bishop Burnet says "the names of bishop and pres-

There can be no doubt that, in the third and fourth centuries, and onwards, important changes took place in the government of the churches. The power of the clergy was increased, and the liberties of the churches were diminished, and ultimately destroyed. In the third and fourth centuries, bishops generally claimed to be a distinct and superior order of ministers. Still, they had not the exclusive power of ordination, nor was it believed, by the more intelligent Christians, that the distinction between them and presbyters was of apostolic origin. Thus Jerome testifies that it had been the custom at Alexandria, for more than two hundred years after Christ, for presbyters to choose and to constitute their bishops.* And Eusebius affirms that, in his day, evangelists sometimes "ordained pastors.†

The author of an ancient commentary, ascribed to Ambrose, says, "The ordination of a bishop and presbyter is the same;" since "a bishop is only the first among presbyters."

byter are used for the same thing in Scripture, and also *are used promiscuously by the writers of the two first centuries.*" See Vindication of the Church of Scotland, p. 311.

* Epis. to Evagrius. † Ecc. Hist., Lib. iii, Cap. 37.

And again; "The first presbyters were called bishops;" and "in Egypt, the *presbyters consecrate*, if the bishop be not present." *

In another ancient work, ascribed to Augustine, the author says, "The apostle Paul proves that by presbyter is to be understood bishop; since he instructs Timothy, whom he had ordained a presbyter, how he ought to constitute bishops. For what is a bishop, but a chief presbyter, a high-priest? For in Alexandria, and in all Egypt, when the bishop is absent, the presbyter consecrates." †

Eutychius, a patriarch of Alexandria (A. D. 930), says, "Mark, the evangelist, appointed twelve presbyters, who should reside with the patriarch, that when the patriarchate might be vacant, they might choose one of their number, on whose head the other eleven might impose hands, and bless him, and constitute him patriarch." ‡

The manner in which the distinction between bishop and presbyter came into the church is pretty fully explained by Jerome,

* Com. in 1 Tim. 3 : 10. Eph. 4 : 11.

† Quaest. Vet. et Nov. Test. Quaest. 101.

‡ In Gieseler's Ecc. Hist., Sect. 32.

in his Commentary on Tit. 1: 5. "A presbyter," says he, "is *the same as a bishop;* and before there were, by the instigation of the devil, parties in religion, the churches were governed *by the joint councils of presbyters.* But afterwards, it was decreed, throughout the whole world, that one chosen from among the presbyters should be put over the rest, and that the whole care of the church should be committed to him." Jerome proceeds to support his opinion as to the original equality of presbyters and bishops, by commenting on Phil. 1: 1, and on the interview of Paul with the Ephesian elders; and then adds, "Our design in these remarks is to show, that among the ancients, *presbyter and bishop were the very same.* But by degrees," says he, "that the plants of dissension might be plucked up, the whole concern was devolved upon an individual. As the presbyters therefore know, that they are subjected, *by the custom of the church,* to him who is set over them, so let the bishops know that they are greater than presbyters, more by *custom,* than by any real appointment of Christ." In his epistles to Evangelus and Oceanus, Jerome assumes and maintains the same positions as in the foregoing passage.

Augustine held to the same doctrine. Writing to Jerome, he says, "Although, according to the names of honor which *the usage of the church has now acquired*, the office of bishop is greater than that of presbyter, yet in many things is Augustine inferior to Jerome." *Epis.* 82.

Chrysostom and Theophylact in like manner affirm, that "while the apostles lived, and for some ages after, the names of bishops and presbyters were not distinguished."*

"It is remarkable," says Gieseler, "how long the opinion of the original identity of bishops and presbyters was retained in the church."† Bernald (A. D. 1088), the most

* Hom. i. In Phil. i.

† The judgment of Gieseler in regard to the question before us is thus expressed: "At the head of each church" (in the first century) "were the elders, *all officially of equal rank*, though in several instances a peculiar authority seems to have been conceded to some one individual, from personal considerations."—*Sect.* 29. "After the death of the apostles, and the pupils of the apostles, to whom the general direction of the churches had always been conceded, some one among the presbyters of each church was suffered gradually to take the lead in its affairs. In the same irregular way, the title bishop was appropriated to this first presbyter."—*Sect.* 32.

zealous advocate of Gregory VII, appeals on this point to the New Testament, and to Jerome, and then proceeds, "Since, therefore, presbyters and bishops may have been said anciently to have been *the same*, it is not to be doubted, that they had the same power of binding and loosing, and *every thing else which is now peculiar to bishops.*" Even Pope Urban ii, at the council of Beneventum (A. D. 1091), speaking of "the sacred orders of deacons and presbyters," says, "Since *these only the primitive church is said to have had*, concerning these alone we have a command of the apostle.*

Nicholas Tudeschus, an archbishop (A. D. 1458), affirms, "Formerly, *presbyters governed the church in common*, and *ordained priests.*"

Indeed, this was the generally received doctrine of the Catholic church, insisted on by both canonists and schoolmen, as Bishop Burnet testifies, until past the middle of the

* Nearly the same words occur in the Sententia of Peter Lombard, Lib. 4, Dist. 24, Cap. 8. Hence Gratian adopts, without hesitation, the above cited passages from Jerome.—Dist. 95, Cap. 5. The same views are also maintained in the Glossa to the Decrees of Gratian. The same view is expressed again, and without opposition, by the papal court canonist, J. Paul Lancellot, A. D 1563.

sixteenth century, when the opposite opinion was affirmed by the Council of Trent. It was on the ground of this decision of the Council of Trent, and with reference to this very subject, that Michael de Medina did not hesitate to declare (A. D. 1570), that "the ancient fathers were *material heretics;* although," says he, "on account of the reverence due to these fathers, their opinion was not openly condemned" in the Council.

At the first dawning of the Reformation, the doctrine of the original parity of Christ's ministers was distinctly asserted. So taught John Wickliffe, in the fourteenth century. So taught Cranmer, and Jewell, and Grindall, and Whitgift, and most of the early reformers and dignitaries of the English Episcopal church. Bishop Jewell says expressly, in his remarks on Augustine, "The office of a bishop is above the office of a priest, *not by the authority of Scripture*, but after the names of honor which, through the custom of the church, have now obtained."

In 1543, was published, in England, a very remarkable treatise, called "A necessary Erudition for a Christian Man." It was drawn up by a committee of bishops and divines, and

read and approved by the lords spiritual and temporal, and by the lower house of parliament. It was corrected by the hand of king Henry VIII, and on this account was sometimes called "*The King's Book.*" This book makes no valid distinction between bishops and priests, and says that "*of these two orders only, priests and deacons, Scripture maketh express mention.*" About the same time with the publication of "the King's Book," there was another paper drawn up in England, and signed by the vicegerent Cromwell, the two archbishops, eleven bishops, and twenty divines and canonists, declaring, among other things, "that in the New Testament, there is no mention made but of deacons or ministers, and priests or bishops."*

Bishop Burnet says, "As for the notion of the distinct offices of bishop and presbyter, *I confess it is not so clear to me;* and therefore, since I look upon the sacramental actions as the highest of sacred performances, I cannot but acknowledge that those who are empowered for them" (as presbyters confessedly are) "must be of *the highest office in the church.*"†

*Burnet's Hist. of the Reformation, Vol. i, p. 585.

†Vindication of the Church of Scotland, p. 336.

Archbishop Usher, in his Letter to Dr. Bernard, says, "I have ever declared my opinion to be, that bishop and presbyter differ in degree only, not *in order;* and that in places were bishops cannot be had, *ordination by presbyters stands valid.*" In his answer to Baxter, Usher also says, "That the king (Charles I) having asked him, at the Isle of Wight, whether he found in antiquity that *presbyters alone ordained any*, he replied, yes; and that he could show his majesty more, even where *presbyters alone successively ordained bishops.*" He then instanced the case referred to by Jerome, in his epistle to Evangelus, "of the presbyters of Alexandria choosing and making their own bishops, from the days of Mark, the evangelist, till those of Heraclas and Dionysius." *

Bishop Crofts says, "I hope my reader will see what weak proofs are brought for this distinction and superiority of order," between bishops and presbyters; "no scripture, no primitive general council, no general consent of primitive doctors and fathers, no, not one primitive father of note, speaking particularly and home to our purpose." †

*Life of Baxter, p. 206. †Naked Truth, p. 47.

Selden, the best read in ecclesiastical antiquity of any man of his time, and whom Grotius styles "the glory of the English nation," turned the doctrine of the divine right of bishops into a jest.

Archbishop Bancroft is said to have been the first of the English Protestant clergy, who insisted on the divine right of bishops; and even he, it would seem, did not hold this opinion constantly; for (A. D. 1610) when it was moved that the Scotch bishops elect might first be ordained presbyters, Bancroft replied that there was no need of it, since *ordination by presbyters was valid.**

Archbishop Laud, of persecuting memory, was a strenuous and consistent advocate of the divine right of bishops. He undertook the defence of this position, while a member of the university, for which he received, it is said, a college censure. He persisted, however, in maintaining the doctrine, and had the happiness to see it prevail under his administration. It has been the belief of high-church Episcopalians, in England and America, from that period to the present.

*In Neal's Hist. of the Puritans, Vol. ii, p. 413.

I have examined now, to as great length as my limits will permit, the claims of our Episcopal brethren to their three orders of ministers, or standing officers, in the church of Christ. That there are two orders, presbyters and deacons, is by common consent admitted. It devolves on those who insist on a third and superior order to vindicate their claim. *The labor of proof is on their hands.* We have examined the arguments commonly adduced in proof of this point, and find that they amount to nothing. Indeed, in the course of the examination, abundant evidence has been elicited to show that the alleged divine right of bishops is unfounded.

We come back, then, with entire confidence upon what we conceive to be the doctrine of the New Testament, that there are but two distinct *orders* or *classes* of officers in the church of Christ; the one having charge of the *spiritual* concerns of the church, the other of its *temporal* concerns; the one commonly denominated *bishops* or *presbyters*, the other *deacons*.

Some have thought that *preaching* belongs to the official work of a deacon. But we have no evidence of this in the original appointment

of deacons, nor in the charge given to Timothy as to their qualifications. The first deacons were appointed, not to assist the apostles in preaching, but to relieve them of a burthen of secular cares and duties, that so *they* might give themselves more entirely to the ministry of the word. Acts 6: 4.

Without doubt, the primitive deacons did every thing in their power, by conversation and exhortation, to promote the spread of the gospel. Thus Stephen was employed, when apprehended for trial, immediately previous to his death. It is moreover, unquestionable, that those who used the office of a deacon well were, in many instances, soon promoted to the higher office. Thus, Philip the deacon is afterwards spoken of as an evangelist. Acts 21: 8. The probability is that he was constituted an evangelist, previous to his visit to Samaria, and to his being engaged in preaching and baptizing there. *

Church officers should be officially *qualified*

*"Preaching," says Bingham, "in the modern sense of the word, *i. e.*, the delivering of public homilies or discourses, was regarded as the proper office of the bishops and presbyters, and *not of the deacons.*"—*Orig. Ecc.*, Book 2, Chap. 20, Sect. 2.

or *constituted* by ordination. This is according to the example of the apostles. The first deacons were ordained; and I know of no good reason why deacons, in our own time, should not be set apart to their very responsible office after the same manner.

Ministers of the gospel, too, should be ordained. Until they are ordained, they are not properly *invested* with the office of a minister, and are not qualified to administer the sacraments of the church.

It has been insisted that bishops alone possess the power of ordination. But in showing that bishop and presbyter denote the same office, we put an end to this high claim.

On the other hand, it has been insisted that *churches* have the right to ordain their ministers; and, as an abstract right, to be exercised only in cases of extreme necessity, this perhaps may be admitted. Still, this is not the way in which church officers ordinarily should be constituted. In the New Testament, and in the first ages of the church, we find this work invariably performed by ministers. Indeed, it is properly committed to ministers; and should never be undertaken by others,

except in cases of such extreme necessity as knows no law. *

SECTION IX.

Church Discipline.

The discipline of a church, in the larger sense of the term, includes all those principles and rules which are adopted, with a view to the purity, order, peace, and efficiency of its members. In a more restricted sense, church

* Cases of necessity sometimes occurred in the primitive church. "Frumentius and Ædesius, two young men, who had no external call or commission to preach the gospel, being carried captive into India, converted a nation, and *settled several churches among them.*" "The Iberians were first converted by a captive woman, who *established churches*, and *constituted the king and queen preachers of the gospel to their people.*"—*Socrat. Ecc. Hist.*, Lib. i, Cap. 19, 20. *Theod.*, Lib. i, Cap. 23. Yet it would be absurd to infer, from cases such as these, that to laymen and women was entrusted, in ordinary circumstances, the right of ordination.

By the early settlers of New England, lay ordinations were encouraged, and often practised. See Cambridge Platform, Chap. 9. But in this respect, our fathers verged, obviously, to an extreme of independency.

discipline has respect to that course of treatment which churches are called upon to pursue towards *offending members*, including instruction, warning, admonition, reproof, excommunication, &c. It is in this latter sense, that the subject here claims our consideration.

The proper *subjects* of church discipline, then, are *offending members;*—those who have entered into covenant with the church, and placed themselves under its watch and care, and who are known to walk in a disorderly manner. With such persons, the church is bound to have recourse to discipline. It is bound to take measures with them, for their reformation, or exclusion.

The power of discipline is evidently lodged in *the church.* It is the duty of individual members to use the milder methods of warning and reproof; but when these fail, it belongs to the church, as a body, publicly to admonish and exclude the offender.

This is the *natural* right of the churches. As it belongs to them to admit members, they ought to have the right, in case individuals prove unworthy, to exclude them. And this right of the churches is expressly recognised in the New Testament. To the aggrieved

brother, Christ says, "Tell it to *the church;* and if he neglect to hear *the church*, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican;"—a form of expression which clearly implies that it belongs to *the church* to hear and judge of offences, and to admonish and (if need be) exclude the offender. Paul, writing to the Corinthian church, says, "*Purge out* the old leaven;" and again, "*Put away from among yourselves* that wicked person." 1 Cor. 5: 7, 13. He exhorts the Roman brethren to "*mark* those which cause divisions and offences, and avoid them;" and the Thessalonians to "*withdraw* themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." Rom. 16: 17. 2 Thess. 3: 6. It is evident from these passages, and others like them, that the power of discipline is vested in *the churches*, and that on them rests the solemn responsibility of maintaining it.

The *ends* to be answered by church discipline are, first, the *recovery*, if it be possible, of the offender. He has broken the covenant of the church, has gone astray, and is in danger of perishing in his sin. His brethren are bound to him by solemn ties; they feel for him, and are ready to do all in their power for his recovery.

But whether they can restore the offender or not, they are under obligations to regard the second great end of discipline, which is *the honor of religion*, and *the purity of the church*. By the fall of a church member, religion is disgraced, and the church is defiled; and there is no way in which the evil can be removed, but by the recovery of the offender, or his exclusion. He must either make confession of his sins, and return to his duty, or he must be separated from the communion of the church. To these great ends of discipline—*the recovery of the offender*, if it be possible, or his *exclusion from the church*—all the steps in a process of discipline should be directed.

It has been made a question, how far we are to consider the direction of Christ, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, as a *rule* of church discipline. In reply, I think it may be safely said, that the *spirit* of this rule should be regarded always, and the *letter* of it, so far as circumstances will allow. Except in cases of notorious and flagrant crime, or where the offender is quite out of the reach of his brethren, there should always be, in the first instance, *private* admonition. Let some suitable

person go to the offender, in a private and friendly manner, and tell him of his fault, and urge him to repentance and reformation. Let him, if need be, *repeat* this labor of love. If the offence is known only to one member of the church, and no sufficient proof of it can be adduced, the individual who knows of it can labor only in a private way. He cannot, with propriety or safety, bring it before the church. If he cannot gain his brother by private admonition, he must leave him to the decisions of the judgment day.*

But if the offence is not strictly private—if it is susceptible of proof, then, when the incipient steps have failed of their object, the case must be brought before the church. A written complaint should be lodged with the pastor, or presiding officer, with a request

* Nor may he, on account of the offence of his brother, absent himself from the communion of the church. To do this would be to commit an offence against the whole church, and expose himself to censure, without any sufficient reason. I can think of no case of offence or grievance, on account of which a professing Christian, *so long as he believed it his duty to remain connected with a church*, would be justified in turning away from its communion.

that it be laid before the church. If the church vote to receive and act upon the complaint, as in all ordinary cases they should, a day is set apart for trial, when the complainant is to establish his charges by proof. If the church decide that the charges, or any considerable portion of them, are sustained, the offender is suspended from communion, and an admonition is sent to him. If he does not "hear the church" in this, a second admonition is sometimes sent. See Tit. 3: 10. If this is disregarded, he is then formally and solemnly excommunicated.

If the offender is dissatisfied with this decision of the church, he has the right of appeal to a mutual council; and it is the duty of the church, ordinarily, to unite with him in calling such a council, if he desires it. Should the church refuse his request for a council, he has a right to call an exparte council. It is to be understood, however, that councils have no right to dictate to a church, or to impose their decisions upon it. They can only express an opinion, and give advice, leaving the church at liberty to act in view of the advice given, according to its own sense of propriety and duty.

The satisfaction to be required of offenders is, *evidence of repentance;—confession of sin*, and *reformation of life*. While the offence is private, a confession may be private. But when the offence has been brought before the church, or in any way has become public, a public confession must be required. Nothing short of this can wipe away the dishonor done to religion, and remove scandal from the church. Every true penitent will *desire* that his confession should be as public as his offence. Still, due care ought to be taken, that the feelings of penitents be not needlessly wounded in cases of this nature; and that feelings of unkindness and revenge, which may be harbored against them, be not intentionally consulted or gratified.

Excommunicated persons should be considered, not as released from their covenant obligations, but as *breakers of covenant*. They should be regarded with feelings of sorrow and concern, and should be made the subjects of special prayer. Where any good is likely to result from such a course, they are to be avoided and shunned. They are to be denied the society and countenance of Christians, that they may be humbled and ashamed. I see

no good reason, however, for the scrupulousness which some have manifested, in refusing to eat with them, and in denying to them the customary civilities of life.*

It is incumbent on the church, and on all its members, to seek the good of excommunicated persons, and to be ready, at all times, to accept of their penitence, to rejoice in their reformation, and to welcome them back to the bosom of the church.

It follows from what has been said, that church discipline is throughout a work of love. In the spirit of love it should be undertaken and pursued; and thus it should be regarded by all concerned in it. The church is no place in which to seek or to take revenge. And those who endeavor faithfully to maintain the discipline of the church should not be accused or suspected of seeking revenge.

* "With such an one, no, not *to eat*." 1 Cor. 5: 11. To me it is evident, that the eating here spoken of is not that of a common meal, but of the Lord's supper; and the direction of the apostle is, "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; let such an one be *put out of the church*, as unworthy to sit with his brethren at the table of the Lord."

When I wander, it may be insensibly, from the path of duty, my Christian brother can afford me no so convincing evidence of his *love*, as in taking me kindly by the hand, and endeavoring to restore me. But this is church discipline.

SECTION X.

Privileges of Church Members.

The privileges of church members are numerous and precious.

1. They have the privilege of being in *visible covenant with God*, and of looking up to him as their covenant Father in Christ. They sustain a covenant relation to God, and he sustains the same important relation to them. They may think and speak of him as in a peculiar sense *their* God, while God regards them (unless they are hypocrites) as in the number of his own peculiar people. He has bound himself by a covenant obligation to protect them, and provide for them. He will in mercy bless them; in faithfulness correct them; and will overrule all things for their

good. He will continue them in this world till he has rendered them meet for a better, and then will receive them to those everlasting mansions which Jesus has gone to prepare for his people.

2. Church members are in visible covenant, not only with God, but with *their brethren in the Lord.* They are united in solemn covenant with those, who will watch over them, and pray for them—who will help them to bear their various burthens, and sympathize with them in their sorrows and their joys. They are in covenant with those, who will strengthen them in weakness, and comfort them in distress—who will warn them in the hour of danger, and reprove and endeavor to reclaim them, when they go astray.

3. Church members have the privilege of coming to the *special ordinances* of the gospel, and of sealing their engagements to be the Lord's. They have the privilege of sitting with their Redeemer at his table, and partaking of the memorials of his body and blood.

4. Church members have many opportunities of *instruction* which they could not enjoy out of the church, and are surrounded with

peculiar and additional *motives* to strengthen them in the performance of duty. The professing Christian has many motives for watchfulness, devotedness, and a religious life—he has many restraints upon his remaining corrupt propensities and habits—he has many and great inducements to hold on his way, and to honor and adorn religion, which, had he not made an open profession of godliness, he could not feel. These additional inducements and restraints are a great help and blessing to the Christian. They are a security against the assaults of temptation, and conspire, with other things, to make up that amount of moral influence, by which the graces of the Christian are to be sustained, and he be fitted for the heavenly kingdom.

From what has been said it appears, that the privileges of membership in the church of Christ are very great—so great, that they cannot be slighted and neglected by any Christian, without manifest and inevitable injury to his soul.

SECTION XI.

Concluding Remarks.

From the remarks which have been made in the foregoing sections relative to the church of Christ, it follows that this is a highly *honorable and important institution.* In the minds of some, there exists a strong prejudice against the church—so strong, that the word itself can hardly be uttered without a sneer; and to be connected with the church is reckoned a disgrace. But what reasonable grounds are there for such a prejudice? What considerations can be urged to show, that the church is not an honorable and important institution?

1. It is a *divine* institution. It originated, not in the wisdom or the will of man, but in the appointment of God; and would God establish an institution that was not honorable and important?

2. The church of God is a very *ancient* institution. It is among the most ancient of which we have any knowledge. God had a church, and probably a visible church, before

the flood. There was a people even then who, in distinction from others, were designated "the sons of God." Gen. 6: 2. The great antiquity of the church is a circumstance, among others, which entitles it to high and grateful consideration. This is one of the two or three *primeval* institutions, which have come down to us from the remotest periods of time.

3. The true character of the church may be learned from its *nature* and *constitution*, as these have been exhibited in the foregoing pages.

Each particular church, we have seen, is a *voluntary* association. None are admitted to it, or so much as proposed for admission, but with their own consent, and at their particular request.

It is an association formed on the basis of the Scriptures, and instituted for the most important purposes. Its objects are, to maintain the worship and ordinances of the gospel, and promote the better edification and greater usefulness of its members.

Like other voluntary associations, each church has the power of electing its own officers, of admitting and excluding members,

and of transacting freely and independently, in open church meeting, its own proper ecclesiastical concerns. No other body has a right to control it, and no being but the Lord Jesus Christ has any claim of jurisdiction over it.

Those who are admitted to the church must be persons, not only of outward morality, but of visible and professed *piety*. And when admitted, they publicly pledge themselves, both to God and their brethren, that they will scrupulously avoid what they know is wrong, and so live before the world as to honor their profession and glorify their Saviour.

When any palpably violate this solemn pledge, they must be brought to repentance, or be excluded from the church. But in this necessary work of discipline, none are proceeded against hastily, or without a fair opportunity for defence. It is not until the offender has been labored with long and faithfully in private; has had opportunity to meet his accuser before the church, and has resisted all the efforts of his brethren to reclaim him, that he is finally excommunicated.

Such are, in brief, the nature and constitution of a Congregational church. And who

can frame any plausible objection against such a body? Who can say, that its object is not good, that its constitution is not free and liberal, that its terms of admission are not such as best comport with its high and holy character and aims, or that its methods of discipline and exclusion are not fair, equitable and efficient?

4. In estimating the claims of the church, some regard must be had to the *actual character* of its members. Though the church of God on earth has at no period been free from the scandal of bad members, and perhaps never will be, still it may be safely affirmed, that the character of its members, in general, compared with that of other men, has been, and is, an honor to the church. In proof of this position, I might adduce the testimony of history. I might appeal to the terms of admission into the church, and to the solemn profession which all its members are required to make. But I prefer to appeal to the implied *concessions* of those who are not friendly to the church. There are those who watch for the *halting* of professing Christians, and who, when they fall into sin, rejoice and triumph over them. But does not this imply,

that the palpable failings of professors of religion are matters of rather infrequent occurrence? Why watch for their imperfections, and rejoice over them, if they are events of common notoriety?

The enemies of religion are often heard to *compare* themselves with particular members of the church. 'We are as good as this or that professor of religion; or we have done no worse than he.' But is it not evident from such comparisons, that professors of religion are regarded as in some sense a *standard*, to which, if others conform, they think they do well enough?

The irreligious are sometimes placed in solemn and distressing circumstances. They are laid on beds of sickness and death; or they are awakened, and anxious for their souls. Under such circumstances, to whom do they apply usually for instruction and consolation? Not to their worldly and sinful companions, but to the *friends of religion*, and to those in general who are *members of the church*. And what a refutation is this of the scandal which is sometimes thrown upon church members! What an open attestation to the general goodness of their moral and Christian characters!

5. The high claims of the church may be inferred from the character, not only of its members, but of its *principal opposers.* At the head of this opposition are "the *gates of hell*" —the *devil and his angels.* Of this we are expressly informed by our Saviour. "On this rock will I build my church, and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" Among those human agents, whose names have come down to us from ancient time, as foremost in the ranks of opposition to the church, are Pharaoh and his host; Jabin king of Canaan; Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite; Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian; Antiochus Epiphanes, who set up the image of Jupiter in the temple of the Lord, and offered swine's flesh upon his altar; Herod, and Nero, and Decius, and Domitian, who made themselves drunk with the blood of the saints; and Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian the apostate, who sought by sophistry and ridicule to undermine and subvert the gospel. In modern times, there can be no doubt as to those who have stood foremost in opposition to the church. They are infidels and scoffers, the licentious and profane, men who cannot endure the restraints of religion, and

to whose ungodly lives its truths and precepts minister a continual reproof. It is no discredit to the church to be opposed and vilified by such men. So far from this, it is an honor to it, and a high honor. Why should the father of lies, and those in general who act under his influence, be all enlisted against the church, if it is not a *holy* church—an honorable and important institution?

6. The church of God is an institution of great importance, because it is the constituted *medium* and *dispenser* of good influences to the world. God has made it the condition of his bestowing spiritual blessings upon the world, that he be *inquired of by his people* to do this for them. And in all that he has done, or is now doing, for the salvation of the world, he is pleased to work through the instrumentality of his professing people. When in ancient times, a revelation was to be given, holy men were inspired, and made the organs of communicating it. When the gospel was to be diffused among the nations of the earth, apostles were commissioned to go forth and publish it. All that is doing in these latter days for the evangelizing of the world, is done through the instrumentality of the church.

God is stirring up his church to prayers and alms, to sacrifices and efforts, and is making it the medium of conferring his choicest blessings. To stand in this most interesting relation between God and the world, and be the appointed medium through which the blessings of heaven are flowing down upon mankind, is certainly a high honor to the church. In this view, the institution is presented to us, as one beyond all others interesting and important.

7. In estimating the character of the church, it will be necessary to consider *the representations of the Bible* respecting it. But in presenting a specimen of these cheering representations, I hardly know where to begin or end. Whole chapters might be quoted from the Old Testament, in which God exhibits his love for his church, and the assurances of its future triumph and peace. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Its foundation is the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Ps. 87: 1–3. "Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and

queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee, with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet." "I will contend with them that contend with thee, and I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob." Is. xlix. In the Old Testament, God speaks of loving his church with an everlasting love, and declares that those who touch it, with the intent to injure it, touch the apple of his eye. Zech. ii.

In the New Testament, Christ is said to have "loved his church, and given himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself *a glorious church*, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." The church is also said to have been purchased with Christ's own blood. Eph. 5: 25. Acts 20: 28. Accordingly, he is represented as *the head*, and *the corner-stone* of the church; and the church is repeatedly spoken of as *his building*, and *his body*. An institution sustaining such relations to God and to Christ, as those here ascribed to the church, and of

which such honorable mention is every where made in the Scriptures, cannot but be one of a very important character.

8. In estimating the character of the church, it may be important to consider how it is regarded *in heaven.* That the church of God exists in heaven, and is to exist there for ever, there can be no doubt. An important portion of the church has been already transplanted from this world to that, and in the end *all* are to be carried there. The church militant is to be swallowed up in the church triumphant, and the entire company of the redeemed is to dwell together in the mansions above for ever. And how are they to be situated there? How are they to be regarded by the other inhabitants of heaven? We have the fullest information on this subject in the Revelation of John. When the heavens were opened to this beloved disciple, he saw the representatives of the redeemed church familiarly mingling with angelic spirits, and with them surrounding the throne of God above. He heard them uniting in a song which no beings in heaven could ever learn, except themselves. He saw the city prepared for their eternal residence—the New Jerusalem descending

from God out of heaven—with its walls of jasper, and its gates of pearl, and its streets of the purest gold. It needed no temple; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were the temple of it. Neither had it need of the sun or the moon; for the glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof. Rev. xxi. Such is the final residence of the redeemed church of Christ, and such the honor to be put upon it in heaven for ever. And is such an institution to be reproached and persecuted upon the earth? Are men, in their madness, to stand aloof from it, and affect to despise it? If they will, they must; but meanwhile let them remember that it is out of their power ultimately to discredit or injure the church of God. Its Protector is strong; its constitution is perfect; its foundation is the holy mountains. It is destined to live—in peace and rest, in honor and glory—when its oppressors shall be trodden together in the dust, and their very names shall have perished.

With another general remark, this discussion will be concluded. If the church of Christ is, what it has been represented to be in the foregoing pages, then it is the duty of

all who enjoy the gospel to become its members. This is evident from two considerations:

1. It is the duty of all, who are favored with the gospel, to become at once the true friends and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. It is the duty of all the real followers of Christ to become his *visible* followers: or which is the same, to become, by a holy profession, members of his church.

Can either of these propositions be disproved? Can either of them be reasonably called in question?

Many persons, I know, are in the habit of framing excuses, and of trusting to them, to justify themselves in a neglect of the church. Some are too young to make a public profession of religion, and some too old. Some think themselves not fit for the church, and others think the church not fit for them. But all such excuses are worthless and sinful. Until persons can disprove the divine origin of the church, and set aside the high and holy claims of the gospel, it will remain the indispensable duty of every person under the gospel, who has come to years of understanding and reflection, to become a faithful, spiritual member of the church of Christ.

There are those who seem to regard a public profession of religion in the light of a *free will offering*, which is required by no antecedent obligations, and which they are at liberty to make or neglect, at pleasure. But this is altogether an inadequate and erroneous view of the subject. A profession of religion *is* required by antecedent and indispensable obligations. It is the *bounden duty* of all who are favored with the light of the gospel. And little do those think—who are often called to the performance of this duty, but who lightly and continually neglect it—what a burthen of guilt they are contracting and accumulating in this way. It is one of the sins of which professors of religion have need to repent, that they so long slighted the claims of the church, and turned their backs on the ordinances of the gospel. And it is one of the sins which those out of the church ought deeply to feel, and for which they ought to mourn and repent, that they have *always* neglected their duty in this respect—that they have never yet performed it, in a single instance.

We urge no one to make a *hypocritical* profession of godliness. But we do sincerely

urge all, who have the means of becoming acquainted with the religion of Christ, to *possess* this religion, and then to *profess* it—to become at once (as they ought) the *real* friends and followers of Christ, and then to join themselves to the number of his *visible* friends and people.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

That there was a class of females in the primitive churches, usually denominated *deaconesses*, admits not of a doubt. They were not the wives of the deacons, but were generally selected from among the widows, and such widows as were considerably advanced in life. See 1 Tim. 5: 9, 10. The apostolic constitutions say, "the deaconess must either be a chaste virgin, or a widow that hath been the wife of one man."

The deaconesses were set apart to their office by the imposition of hands; "yet, this mode of consecration," says Bingham, "gave them no *sacerdotal* power. Women were expressly forbidden to exercise the sacred functions of the clergy; and it was made one of the charges against certain classes of heretics and schismatics, that they allowed women to preach, and perform other functions of

the ministry. Thus Epiphanius says, "There is, indeed, an order of deaconesses in the church, but their business is not to administer the sacraments, or to perform any part of the sacerdotal office, but only *to be a decent help to the female sex at the time of their baptism, sickness, affliction, or the like.*" They assisted in preparing their own sex for baptism, so that the ceremony might be decently performed. They were also employed in visiting females who were sick, or in distress, especially in cases where the deacons could not so well go, on account of scandal. In times of persecution, the deaconesses were accustomed to minister to the confessors and martyrs in prison, because they could do it with less suspicion and danger than men. They also assigned to the women their places in church, and observed and regulated their behaviour.

How long this order continued in the church is not certainly known. It was not laid aside all at once. There were decrees against it in the western church in the fifth century, but it was not until the tenth or eleventh century that all traces of it became extinct." See Bingham's Orig. Ecc., Book ii, Chap. 22.

NOTE B.*

It has been held by some, in both ancient and modern times, that the creed commonly called the Apostle's was composed by them. This opinion is however without foundation, inasmuch as the writers of the first three centuries intimate no such thing, and the testimony of subsequent writers only goes to prove that creeds in general were of apostolical institution, and that this creed is apostolical, in regard to substance of doctrine.

It is certain that the early Christians used creeds, in substance the same, though not agreeing precisely in form. It may be interesting to bring together several of the ancient creeds, preserved in different writers, illustrating the substantial unity of the ancient church, in point of doctrine.

CREED OF IRENÆUS.

"The church, though it be dispersed over all the world from one end of the earth to the other, received from the apostles and their disciples, the belief in one God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven, and earth, and sea, and all things in them:

* The greater part of the following Note is from Bingham's Orig. Ecc., Book iii, Chap. 2.

and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was incarnate for our salvation: and in the Holy Ghost, who preached by the prophets the dispensations of God: and the advent, and nativity of a virgin, and passion, resurrection from the dead, and bodily ascension of the flesh of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, our Lord, into heaven; and his coming again from heaven in the glory of the Father, to consummate all things, and raise the flesh of all mankind: that according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth, to Jesus Christ, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King; and that every tongue should confess him; and that He shall exercise just judgment upon all, and send spiritual wickedness, the transgressing and apostate angels, with all ungodly, unrighteous, and blaspheming men, into everlasting fire; but grant life to all righteous and holy men, that keep his commandments and persevere in his love, some from the beginning, others after repentance, on whom he confers immortality and invests them with eternal glory."

CREED OF ORIGEN.

"The things which are manifestly handed down by apostolical preaching are these: First, That there is one God, who created and made all things,

and caused the whole universe to exist out of nothing; the God of all the just that ever were from the first creation and foundation of all; the God of Adam, Abel, Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noe, Sem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets; and that this God in the last days, as he had promised before by his prophets, sent our Lord Jesus Christ, first to call Israel and then the Gentiles, after the infidelity of his people Israel. This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, gave both the Law and the Prophets, and the Gospels, being the God of the Apostles, and of the Old and New Testament." The next article is, "that Jesus Christ, who came into the world, was begotten of the Father before every creature, who, ministering to his Father in the creation of all things (for by him all things were made), in the last times made himself of no reputation and became man: he who was God, was made flesh, and when he was man, he continued the same God that he was before. He assumed a body in all things like ours, save only that it was born of a virgin by the Holy Ghost. And because this Jesus Christ was born and suffered death common to all, in truth, and not only in appearance, he was truly dead; for he rose again truly from the dead, and after his resurrection conversed with his disciples, and was taken up into heaven. They also delivered unto us, that the Holy Ghost was joined in the same honor and dignity with the Father and the Son."

CREED OF TERTULLIAN.

"There is one rule of faith only which admits of no change or alteration, that teaches us to believe in one God Almighty, the Maker of the world; and in Jesus Christ his Son, who was born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, the third day arose again from the dead, and being received into heaven, he sitteth now at the right hand of God, who shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead, by the resurrection of the flesh."

CREED OF GREGORY THAUMATURGUS.

"There is one God, the Father of the living Word, the subsisting wisdom and power, the eternal express image of God, who is a perfect begetter of a perfect, a Father of an only begotten Son. And one Lord, one of one, God of God, the character and image of the Godhead, the word of power, the wisdom that comprehends the whole system of the world, the power that made every creature. The true Son of the true Father, invisible of invisible, incorruptible of incorruptible, immortal of immortal, eternal of eternal. And one Holy Ghost, who has his existence from God, who was manifested to men by the Son, the perfect image of the perfect Son, the living cause of all living, the fountain of holiness, essential sanctity, who is the au-

thor of holiness in others: in whom God the Father is manifested, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, whose power runs through all things. A perfect Trinity, whose glory, eternity and dominion is no way divided or separated from each other. In this Trinity, therefore, there is nothing created or servile, nothing adventitious or extraneous, that did not exist before, but afterward came into it. The Father was never without the Son, nor the Son without the Spirit, but the Trinity abides the same, unchangeable and invariable for ever."

CREED OF LUCIAN THE MARTYR.

"We believe, according to the tradition of the Gospels, and Apostles, in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator, and Maker, and Governor of all things, of whom are all things: and in one Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, who is God, by whom are all things, who was begotten of the Father, God of God, Whole of Whole, One of One, Perfect of Perfect, King of King, Lord of Lord, the Word, the Wisdom, the Life, the true Light, the true Way, the Resurrection, the Shepherd, the Gate, the incommutable and unchangeable image of the divine essence, power and glory, the first-born of every creature, who was always from the beginning God the Word with God, according to what is said in the Gospel; 'and the Word was God,' by whom

all things were made and in whom all things subsist, who in the last days descended from on high, and was born of a virgin according to the Scriptures, and being the Lamb of God, he was made the Mediator between God and men, being fore-ordained to be the author of our faith and life; for he said, 'I came not from heaven to do my own will but the will of him that sent me.' Who suffered and rose again for us the third day, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Ghost, which is given to believers for their consolation, and sanctification, and consummation, according to what our Lord Jesus Christ appointed his disciples, saying, 'Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Whence the properties of the Father are manifest, denoting him to be truly a father, and the properties of the Son, denoting him to be truly a son, and the properties of the Holy Spirit, denoting him to be truly the Holy Ghost: these names not being simply put, and to no purpose, but to express the particular subsistence, or hypostatic substance, as the Greeks term it, of each person named, so as to denote them to be three in hypostasis, and one by consent."

CREED OF THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM.

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, the true God, by whom all things were made, who was incarnate and made man, who was crucified and buried, and the third day he rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and shall come to judge the quick and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end: And in the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who spake by the prophets. In one baptism of repentance, in the remission of sins, in one Catholic Church, in the resurrection of the flesh, and in life everlasting."

CREED OF THE CHURCH AT ALEXANDRIA.

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord, God the Word, begotten of Him before all ages; by whom all things were made, that are in heaven and in earth; who came down from heaven, and was incarnate, and suffered, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, and in the resurrection of the flesh, and in the life of the world

to come, and in the kingdom of heaven, and in one Catholic Church of God extended from one end of the earth to the other."

CREED OF THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH.

"I believe in one only true God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all creatures visible and invisible: and in Jesus Christ our Lord, his only begotten Son, the first born of every creature, born of Him before all ages, and not made, very God of very God, consubstantial with the Father: by whom the world was framed, and all things made: who for our sakes came, and was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried, and the third day rose according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead."

CREED OF THE CHURCH AT ROME, CALLED THE APOSTLES' CREED.

"I believe in God, the Father, Almighty; and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried, and the third day rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of

the Father, whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Church, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the flesh. Amen."

NOTE C.

It has been made a question whether the articles of a church (its creed and covenant) should require any thing more than what is *absolutely essential to the existence of piety*, so that, by no possibility, any truly pious person should be, by the articles, excluded. In proof of what has been termed the liberal view on this subject, it has been urged, that the church, with its ordinances and privileges, is an institution of Christ, designed for the benefit of *all* his children; and hence to exclude any of his children, by articles of human construction, from his church and his table, is to dishonor Christ, and to defeat (to some extent at least) the design of his institutions.

But, in opposition to this view, several things worthy of serious consideration may be urged.

1. It is no easy matter to determine what amount of truth in the understanding *is absolutely essential to piety in the heart*,* and of course, on the ground

* It may not be difficult to ascertain what doctrines are essential to *the system of Christian truth*, so that, if they were left out of it, the system would be essentially impaired. But to ascertain what amount of truth in the understanding is *absolutely essential to piety in the heart*, is a very different question, and one much more difficult of solution.

here examined, what amount it would be proper to retain in our church articles, and what to exclude from them. Many think that true piety is possible, in connexion with some forms of Unitarianism and Universalism. Others extend their charity so far as to embrace the better sort of heathens and infidels. If the articles of the church must be so curtailed that, by no possibility, any pious person can be excluded, it is doubtful whether any thing would remain; or if any thing, what and how much. But,

2. Has a church a *right*, in framing its articles, to omit any part of what it conceives to be essential in the system of Christian doctrine or practice? The Bible is all of it a revelation from God, which he has given to his people for their good; and it is incumbent on them to receive it all. And in framing, as the basis of church union, an epitome of what the Bible is supposed to teach, what *right* have they to omit certain doctrines and duties, which they conceive to be of great importance, merely out of respect to the opinions of others? Are the opinions of others to be their guide in this matter, or their own convictions? And have they a *right*, from a regard to others, to base a church on one half or one quarter of what they honestly believe to be God's system of revealed truth, and omit the rest?

3. It may be inquired again, whether the written creed of a church should not be in accordance

with its *real belief;* and in case it is not, whether the former can, with any propriety, be denominated *the creed of the church.* Here, for example, is a company of Christians who believe that the doctrine of election is an essential part of the system of revealed truth, and that infant baptism is of divine institution; but in framing their articles, they omit both these points, under the impression that, if retained, they may be the means of excluding some real Christians. I ask now whether their articles are the *real creed of the church,* or only a maimed and imperfect part of it; and whether, in proposing it as the creed of the church, they are not justly chargeable with dishonesty.

It is of great importance, that those who are expecting to unite habitually in the most solemn acts of religious worship (as is the case with members of the same church) should be agreed in all the essential points of Christian doctrine and duty. Their own peace and edification require this. And the honor and interests of religion require the same. To secure this important object is the design of church articles; and when these are framed sincerely and truly, according to the convictions of those who adopt them (as they should be certainly, if they are framed at all), I conceive that no just ground of offence is given, even if a *pious* person shall find them such that he cannot in sincerity accede to them. Were there any attempt to *impose* them upon him, or in any way to force his con-

science, he would have reason to complain; but when they are merely *proposed* for his consideration, and he is left perfectly free to receive or reject them, it is believed that he has no just cause of complaint. He has *his* rights of conscience, and the church have theirs, and if he cannot consistently unite with them, he is at liberty to find or form some other church with which he can unite. Certainly, were an individual to demand more than this of a church—were he to require them to reject from their articles what they conceived to be essential in Christian doctrine, *they* would have good reason for complaint. For this would be requiring them to sacrifice their own consciences, to relieve his.

The church is, indeed, an institution of Christ, and designed for the special benefit of his people, his children. But how are his children to partake of its benefits? On certain conditions; or without any conditions? In a prescribed way; or in any way that shall best suit their inclinations? Are they to partake of them in a single organization; or in different and circumstantially varied organizations, as their own preferences and the providence of God shall direct?

NOTE D.

"It is certain," says Dr. Increase Mather, "that in the next age to the apostles, a pastor was not settled in any church without the concurrence of others. When the church had elected a pastor, they presented him to the neighbor pastors for their approbation; nor could he be legally confirmed without it. Eusebius tells us, that when Alexander was chosen pastor of the church at Jerusalem by the brethren of that place, he had the common consent of the circumjacent pastors. Lib. vi, c. ii. And thus, as Cyprian informs us, it was practised in all the churches throughout Africa. He speaks particularly concerning Sabinus, who was elected pastor of Eremita in Spain, how that neighbor ministers concurred in his ordination, after the fraternity had elected him." *Order of Churches vindicated*, p. 79.

Bingham notices the following as modes of communion among the different churches in ancient times:

1. They had communion in a common faith. All churches which departed from the rule of faith were held as heretical. To secure the requisite unity in this respect, "every bishop at his ordination made a declaration of his faith before the provincial synod, and also sent circular letters to other churches, to signify that he was in communion with the catholic church."

2. "The churches were required to give each other mutual assistance in opposing fundamental errors, and in preserving the common faith."

3. A member of any particular church was expected, as opportunity presented, to "join in communion with all other churches, in divine worship and holy offices. To this end it was requisite that every church should keep itself free from superstitious and idolatrous worship, and from every thing not conformable to the analogy of the Christian faith; and on the other hand that every Christian, when he came to a foreign church, should readily comply with all the usages and rules of that church in regard to those indifferent matters which each bishop and church were left to regulate according to their views of edification and general expediency. This was a necessary rule of peace and unity: for there would naturally be a greater or less diversity of customs and forms in things indifferent."

4. There was a "mutual consent of the churches, to ratify all legal acts of discipline exercised by any particular church. A person in regular communion with one church had a right, when travelling, to the privileges of other churches, if he carried with him his commendatory letters (*literæ formatæ*), to signify that he was in peace and communion with his church. On the other hand, if a man was excommunicated or suspended in his own church, no other church would admit him to communion, till he had reconciled himself to his church."

5. The churches were all of them expected to submit to what was regarded as *the common law* of the general church, viz., "to that which, by general consent, was handed down from apostolical tradition, and to that which was settled by the determination of general councils." See Bingham's Ecc. Orig., Book 16, Chap. i.

NOTE E.

It is admitted on all sides that, at the time of Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20: 17—38), Timothy was not bishop of Ephesus, and never had been. But it is insisted by bishop Pearson, and by most modern Episcopalians, that the first Epistle to Timothy was written as late as the year 65, long subsequent to this meeting with the elders, and subsequent to the conclusion of the history in the Acts. But to this hypothesis there appear to me to be insuperable objections.

1. It is entirely gratuitous. There is no proof of it in any part of the New Testament, or in the writings of the early Christians.

2. Timothy is spoken of in Paul's first Epistle to him as a *youth* (Chap. 4: 12); which would scarcely be true of him as late as the year 65.

3. Timothy was left at Ephesus, as appears from the directions in this first Epistle, to complete the organization of the church, by constituting bishops and deacons. (Chap. 3.) But it is inconceivable that this church should have remained without

church officers till the year 65, as many as eight or ten years after its planting. Indeed, it is certain, from the meeting at Miletus, that they were not without officers.

4. According to Lardner (who, in opposition to my previous convictions, has satisfied me of the truth of his hypothesis), the second Epistle to Timothy was written as early as the year 61, near the commencement of Paul's first imprisonment at Rome; and certainly the first Epistle must have been written several years earlier.

The following seems to be the true chronology of the first Epistle to Timothy, and the connexion in which it stands in the history of Paul. When this apostle had labored more than two years at Ephesus (Acts 19: 10), he formed the design of leaving, to go through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem, and afterwards to Rome (ver. 20). With this object in view, he sends into Macedonia Timothy and Erastus, while he "stays at Ephesus for a season" (ver. 22). After their departure, he writes his first Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he speaks of himself as at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16: 8), and of Timothy as in Greece (1 Cor. 4: 17. 16: 10, 11). Tarrying longer than he intended at Ephesus, Timothy returns to the apostle there (1 Cor. 16: 11). On account of the disturbance at Ephesus, Paul leaves suddenly for Macedonia, and entreats Timothy to remain for a time (Acts 20: 1. 1 Tim. 1: 3). From Macedonia, Paul writes the first Epistle to Timothy in the latter part of the year 56. At the

time of writing it, Paul hopes to come to Ephesus, on his way to Jerusalem (1 Tim. 3. 13, 14), but is detained in Greece longer than he expected, and Timothy comes to him. From Macedonia Paul writes his second Epistle to the Corinthians, in which Timothy unites with him (2 Cor. 1: 1, and 9: 1—5). They visit Corinth, and remain several months, and then return through Macedonia to Troas, and afterwards to Miletus, where they meet the Ephesian elders. (See Acts 20.) It hence follows that the first Epistle to Timothy was written a very considerable time previous to this meeting.

NOTE F.

Great stress is laid by certain Episcopal writers on their alleged apostolical succession. The theory is, that the apostles ordained bishops to be successors to themselves: who, in their turn, ordained others to be successors to themselves; and these again ordained others; and so there has been an uninterrupted succession of Episcopal ordinations from the apostles' time to the present,—in the line of which succession, there has been a valid ministry and sacraments, which are represented as of great and saving efficacy, but out of which there is no valid ministry or sacraments, if indeed there is a possibility of salvation.

In reference to this theory, I must be permitted to offer a few remarks. And

1. I would inquire as to the nature of that mys-

terious, nameless something, which is supposed to have been imparted by the apostles to their successors, and by them to theirs, and so on through a period of near two thousand years, which gives to the sacraments so potent an efficacy, when administered by those who are in the succession, and leaves them so inefficacious and valueless, when administered by others. What is it? Is it any thing? And is the theory which involves so strange a supposition any better than a dream?

2. If the theory under consideration is founded in truth, then the fact of the alleged apostolical succession ought to be one of the most obvious certainty. It ought to be clear, in all its parts, and to be susceptible of the fullest and most satisfactory proof. Certainly, if in order to be a minister, and qualified as such to administer the Christian sacraments, a man must be in the succession, he ought to *know* when he assumes the ministerial office, that he is in the succession. There should be no room for doubt on the subject. A suspicion here must be fatal to his peace. And not only so, a people should be able to *assure* themselves, when they receive a minister, that he is in the succession. As the validity of his official acts depends altogether upon this fact, there should be no room for doubt or hesitation in regard to it. Certainly, if the theory under consideration is true, the fact of an uninterrupted apostolical succession ought to be one of the clearest and most obvious certainty. But this leads me to remark,

3. That this assumed fact is not clear. It is not susceptible of satisfactory proof. In regard to any bishops now living, or who are likely to live, it cannot be rendered so much as probable.

I shall not take it upon me to *disprove* the fact of an uninterrupted apostolical succession,—this is not incumbent on those who reject the theory;—but merely to state some difficulties in the way of those who may attempt to establish this fact, with reference particularly to the bishops of the church of England.

These bishops commonly trace their succession, through the church of Rome, to the apostle Peter. But who can prove that the apostle Peter was ever bishop of Rome? And who can prove that the first ministers of this church were any thing more than presbyters? Irenæus expressly calls them presbyters, and it is very certain that they were presbyters.—Again, who can tell who these first ministers were, and in what order they succeeded each other? The modern church of Rome is confounded here, and has no means of determining the point, except on the ground of her own infallible decisions. "Contested elections at Rome, and in almost all considerable cities, make it very dubious which were the true bishops; and decrees of councils rendering all those ordinations null, where any simoniacal contract was the foundation of them, makes it impossible to prove, at least on the principles of the Romish church, that there is now upon

earth any one person who is a legal successor of the apostles."

But here is not the whole difficulty of the case. Is it certain that the church of Rome, down to the time of the Reformation, sustained the character of a true church of Christ, and that her bishops are to be regarded as true ministers of Christ? Or is it not rather certain that, ages previous to the Reformation, this idolatrous and persecuting church had proved herself to "the whore of Babylon"—the great Antichrist of the New Testament? Such at least, was the opinion of the early reformers and fathers of the English church, and on this ground they justified their separation from Rome.

In regard to this question, the following positions seem to me safe and indubitable: "Either the church of Rome is a false and heretical church, or she is not. If she be, it follows that she has no lawful ministry, nor a power to transmit any. If she be not false and heretical, or in other words, if she be a true church; then the churches which separated from her are schismatical and heretical, and of course are incapable of having any lawful ministry. The advocates of an uninterrupted succession through the church of Rome are hemmed in betwixt the two horns of this dilemma, one of which must give them a mortal wound, let them turn themselves which way they please."

But even here is not the whole difficulty attending the theory of an uninterrupted succession. Allowing that the church of Rome is capable of trans-

mitting the succession, with all the mystical virtues supposed to be attached to it, can the English bishops prove incontestably that they are in the succession of the Romish church? It has been strenuously insisted, that this cannot be proved. It has been said that, "in the year 668, the successors of Austin the monk being almost entirely extinct, by far the greatest part of the bishops were of *Scottish* ordination by *Aidan* and *Finnan*, who came out of the Culdee monastery of Columbanus, and were no more than *presbyters*."

On the whole, I agree with Dr. Doddridge, who says, "It is a very precarious and uncomfortable foundation for Christian hope, which is laid in the doctrine of an uninterrupted succession of bishops, and which makes the validity of the administration of Christian ministers depend upon such a succession;"* and with bishop Hoadley, who says, "I am fully satisfied that until a consummate stupidity can be happily established, and universally spread over the land, there is nothing that tends so much to destroy all due respect to the clergy, as the demand of more than can be due to them; and nothing has so effectually thrown contempt upon a regular succession of the ministry, as the calling no succession regular but what was uninterrupted; and the making the eternal salvation of Christians to depend upon that uninterrupted succession, of which the *most learned have the least assurance, and the unlearned can have no notion, but through ignorance and credulity.*"

* Lect. 117, Sec. 6.

NOTE G.

Without going into a consideration of the *external* evidence for and against the epistles of Ignatius (though the preponderance of this is clearly against them), the *internal* evidence is of itself sufficient to shake, if not utterly destroy, their credit. The style, the spirit, the sentiments, do not agree to the alleged circumstances of the writer, or to the age in which he lived. They are like nothing which has come down to us from the first century of the Christian era, or the early part of the second, but much like what might be expected of a pious forger of the third or fourth century. The burden of the writer's exhortations to the churches is, *Obey your bishop, obey your bishop;* as though this were of all duties the first and greatest, the most binding and most important. "Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ did the Father; and the presbytery, as the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as the command of God." *Epis. to the Smyrneans*, Sect. 8.

After an impartial view of the whole case, I accord with the sentiment of Prof. Norton, as expressed in his very learned work on "the Genuineness of the Gospels." "I doubt," says he, "whether any book, in its general tone of sentiment and language, ever betrayed itself as a forgery more clearly, than do these pretended epistles of Ignatius." *Notes*, p. 284.

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